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THE PHANTOM KNIGHTS.

A TALE OF CHIVALRY.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "MEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS," "RED RUDIGER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," ETC.



POINT FOR POINT ALIKE, SHEATHED IN GRAY GLEAMING MAIL FROM HEAD TO FOOT, THE PHANTOM KNIGHTS CONFRONT EACH OTHER.

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PROLOGUE.

WHAT is that?

A dim shadow seems to be creeping over the valley, and the fierce sun fades slowly into a fiery red ball in the heavens, as a little black cloud makes its appearance on the horizon.

A hollow moaning sound becomes faintly audible in the mountains, presage of the deadly sirocco, borne in from the wastes of the Sahara, bringing lightning and destruction in its train.

Now, while the light is changed to dimness, while the freaks of the mirage are most bewildering, two moving figures seem to shape themselves into existence and advance into the heart of the valley. Are they real or phantoms?

Silently as spirits they come, in the similitude of two armed knights, point for point alike. Horses and riders are alike gray and misty, with the hue of a curling smoke-wreath, seen against the background of yellow plain and dark mountain. The outlines of their figures tremble as if they, too, were creations of the mirage, and no sound comes from the footfalls of their horses as they glide forward through the ghostly shimmer of the haze.

Wild legends of specters and apparitions start unbidden to the spectator's mind as the Phantom Knights ride on through the arid valley.

Who are they, and what can they be, that thus intrude into a realm that even the crows have deserted?

Dimmer and dimmer grows the violet haze of the threatening sirocco, hotter and hotter the air of the valley, as the Phantom Knights ride on.

The vultures in the sky have ceased to circle; they hover motionless in the upper air; yet still the Phantom Knights advance.

The lizards have crept to their holes in the rocks; the wild goats have vanished up the furrowed peaks of the mountains; yet still the Phantom Knights ride on.

The stillness has become oppressive; the gloom more unearthly; the parched earth gapes wider than ever in its myriad seams; yet the Phantom Knights ride on.

At last they meet in the midst of the valley. Meet by the bleaching skeleton and vanished pool. Death and the Phantom Knights have come together.

Phantoms or living beings, the meeting is evidently unwelcome and unexpected.

Silently as ever, but as if moved by one impulse, the Phantom Knights start aside and stare at each other like spirits meeting in the void of space.

Horse and rider, real or unreal, there they pause for a moment, while the vapors of the mirage curl around them in a strange and fantastic picture.

Point for point alike, sheathed in gray gleaming mail from head to foot, their pale faces set and stern, fierce eyes glaring at each other, their chargers of the same dim and spectral hue, the Phantom Knights confront each other.

Then, as if moved by a single impulse, with the ferocity of a hate that lives beyond the grave, they rush forward with bare weapons and close in desperate strife.

A mystery of eight hundred years ago, a wild legend of Moor and Spaniard, the story of the Phantom Knights is still told with bated breath by the Castilian shepherd, as he sits by his cottage hearth.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAIDEN TRIBUTE.

WHEN the Moors ruled over Spain the Christians were divided into petty principalities that could hardly be called kingdoms.

Up in the north-west corner of the peninsula, next to the Bay of Biscay, lay the little state of Leon, a group of peasants and knights hiding among the mountains.

Next to them, on the slopes of the Pyrenees, stood the petty kingdom of Navarre, called after "Nava," the Gothic word for "a clearing," when it was a mere meadow hewn out of the forests.

Next on the east came the free confederation of the nobles of Arragon, who sat in the Cortes and yielded but a nominal obedience to their kings.

But next to the Moorish border, in front of Leon, lay the dominion of the bravest lord of all. It was the "Land of Castles," its border studded with rock-perched fortresses, frowning defiance on the Moslem, and glorying in the proud name "Castile."

Right up to the borders of Castile stretched the dominions of the Caliph Haschem, who dreamed away his days and nights amid the gardens of Cordova, and left war and peace alike to the great vizier, Al Mansour, The Invincible.

He did well in this, for Al Mansour had deserved his title. He had harried the Christians everywhere, penetrating to the very waters of the ocean; had rifled the shrine of St. Iago of Compostella, and had made the name of Moslem dreaded from the Straits to the Pyrenees.

Still Al Mansour, with all his forays, had not pushed his master's settled dominions beyond the borders of the Land of Castles. The polished and luxurious Moor saw nothing in the rugged mountains to tempt him to remain there. The Moslem had all of Spain that was worth keeping, and had turned the country into a blooming garden, studded with rich cities.

On the borders of the Land of Castles, in the days of Al Mansour, a young knight shabbily equipped in rusty armor and followed by his squire, rode out from a wild pass in the hills and saw before him the great plains of Toledo, glittering in the sun with its maze of irrigating canals.

The smiling green meadows and darker verdure of the groves and orchards; the fleecy white of the cotton-fields, where the plants were just bursting their pods; the drooping leaves of the palms and the dark foliage of the olives; the white walls of Toledo; the domes and minarets that soared skyward from among the gardens of the city; all these objects formed an enchanting picture to one who had but just emerged from the sterile passes of the Land of Castles.

The young knight drew rein and gazed on the prospect for some moments in silence; then gave a heavy sigh as he remarked:

"Ah, Pepito, is it not a shame to all true Christian knights that these Infidels should possess this fair land; while we, who hold the true faith, slink in holes among the rocks? Now by my vows of knighthood I would that all were of my mind. We would sweep the Moors into the sea."

The squire whom he addressed was a very different person from his master.

The knight was tall, handsome and fair haired, the squire short, sturdy, and very dark. The knight's smooth face and blue eyes were a great contrast to the brilliant black eyes and short curling beard of the stout squire. The knight seemed full of enthusiasm and melancholy; the squire had a perpetual laugh on his broad honest face.

Now he grinned humorously as he answered his master's complaint.

"The Moors are rude fellows, master. They will not go into the sea to oblige St. Iago and the Holy Virgin. Faith, I'm not so sure but Al Mansour would beat us if we tried this sweeping business."

"Never, Pepito, never; unless all our knighthood were gone. He might kill us, but our bodies would stay here, and the blood of the martyrs must prevail in the end."

Pepito grinned again. "I have seen a living dog bark at a dead lion and I thought that the dog had the best of it, master."

The young knight frowned as he answered impatiently:

"Thou speakest like the clod thou art. The vows and pains of our glorious knighthood are not for such as thee. But oh, Pepito, I would now that some glorious adventure would come to hand. I have donned the golden spurs, but I have not given them their baptism of blood. I am not yet worthy to be called a true cavalier."

Pepito shrugged his broad shoulders. "The knight makes the spurs red; the squire cleans them. I am content without adventures, good master."

"Then why camest thou with me, Pepito? Thou knowest I seek all sorts of perils, for the glory of St. Iago and Our Lady."

"Because I am a fool, and because I used to nurse your worship as a child," returned the squire. "We shall have adventures soon enough, my master, for here we are on the Moorish border, and yonder comes a troop of the Infidels that will give you all the blows your worship can desire."

The young knight eagerly looked in the direction indicated, and saw, as the squire had said, a small troop of armed Moors coming from another pass that debouched into the plain below, on the broad highway from Burgos to Toledo, a remnant of old Roman times.

There were about a dozen men on horseback, glittering in steel, and wearing fluttering scarfs of silk and gold; while a long procession of mule litters followed them, conducted by black slaves on foot.

At the head of the whole procession rode a dark slender Arab cavalier, whose glossy pointed beard and rich armor proclaimed him a dandy of the Moslem army.

No sooner did the young knight see this troop than he turned to Pepito and handed him the light traveling cap which he wore, saying:

"Give me my helmet, Pepito. I will accost these miscreants, and we will have an adventure by the favor of St. Iago."

"Good master, are you mad?" exclaimed the squire, amazedly. "Know you not that there are enough of those Moors to cut a good Christian, all to pieces, be he ever so good a knight?"

"Not all the Moors Al Mansour can muster

can awe the courage of a true knight," was the proud reply. "Give me my helmet, Pepito."

"But, my master, consider, there is peace between Castile and the Moor," urged Pepito, who had not thought that his master would seriously undertake the mad adventure.

But the wild unreasoning spirit of chivalry was up, and the knight would listen to nothing.

"Give me the helmet," he repeated obstinately. "Gonzalo Gonzales is a knight; and a knight holds no peace with Infidels."

Pepito shrugged his shoulders in a manner that implied unwilling resignation, and handed his young master the helmet he had been carrying before him on a steady old mule.

Young Gonzalo fastened the laces, and then rode forward, and taking the trot so as to be first to reach the junction of the highway on which the Moorish cavalcade was entering. He was followed at a respectful distance by Pepito, grumbling to himself. The squire, it must be said in his favor, had no defensive armor, and was therefore apparently in no condition to cope with a number of enemies. He was dressed in the rude costume of a Spanish peasant soldier of the day; a leathern cap, a frock of leather girt with a rope, and sandals of leather. He bore no shield, and his only weapons were a long spear and a huge knife. As soon as he saw that his master was seriously bent on fighting, he dismounted from his gray mule and followed the knight on foot, carrying his spear on his shoulder.

In the mean time the young knight rode boldly on to intercept the Moorish procession, which advanced tranquilly along the highway. Within a quarter of an hour they were within hailing distance of each other; when the Christian threw forward his lance, waved it in the air, and cried out:

"Stay thy course, misbelieving Moor! I am Don Gonzalo Gonzales, who defies all followers of Mohammed. Whither goest thou?"

The Moorish chief involuntarily checked his horse to listen, and the procession stopped.

When Don Gonzalo had finished, the Moslem smiled slightly as he remarked to one of his companions;

"This must be one of those mad knights of whom we have heard, Sidi Abd Allah. We must not kill him, for that is against the orders of the Vizier. What shall we do, thinkest thou?"

He spoke to a gray-bearded Moor whose scarred face bespoke the old soldier, and who answered:

"I would go forward, Aben Amar, and warn this madman to give us free passage with the Maiden Tribute. If he attacks us and gets killed, it will not be our fault."

Aben Amar nodded his head and resumed his way, without noticing the knight's summons.

But Gonzalo, who had watched him keenly, now suddenly closed his visor, couched his lance, and rode straight at the Moor.

Aben Amar saw him coming, and at once put spurs to his high-bred Arabian horse, which started on a hand gallop to meet the knight.

The Christian's horse was a tall, powerful beast and the rider was sheathed in steel from head to foot, while the Moslem had but a light steel cap and tunic of mail, his limbs being bare of armor.

The contest between the two seemed to be so clearly unequal that no one would have wondered to see the Moor spitted on the Christian's lance.

Nevertheless it was not to be.

Just as they met, Aben Amar, with a touch of the spur and rein, made his trained charger spring to one side, and Gonzalo thundered harmlessly by, the Moor saluting him with a taunting laugh.

That laugh however was changed the next minute into a cry of surprised alarm. Gonzalo kept his course like an arrow at full speed, and dashed into the midst of the escort as they rode together.

Before the Moors could scatter according to their manner of war, the heavy Christian lance had pierced the foremost through and through, bearing him over his horse's croup so far that the point of the weapon actually struck the breast of the next man behind, and entered his heart.

Then Don Gonzalo threw aside the clogged weapon, drew his long, straight sword, and began to lay about him in a lusty fashion, all the time shouting:

"St. Iago for Castile! Our Lady for Gonzales! Down with the Infidels!"

For a moment the Moors were paralyzed with astonishment at the mad assault, and then they turned on the Christian champion and attacked him furiously.

But here they gave the tall knight the advantage. Their slender frames and light horses were no match for his sinewy limbs and strong if clumsy horse; and confidence in their numbers alone made them choose such a way of attack.

His great charger wheeled and plunged about in the close fight, dashing the slight Arabians aside like sucking foals, while the long, heavy sword of the knight beat down buckler and guard with ease.

In less than a minute Don Gonzalo had cut down Sidi Abd Allah and four other Moors, and the rest began to scatter in terror and amazement. Their panic was completed a moment later, when Pepito the squire, who had been unnoticed in the fray, suddenly made his appearance and began to stab the Moors in the back, with quick, short thrusts of his spear, before any one could stop him.

Then indeed the few Moslems that remained lost heart and turned to flee, calling out:

"The Almogavars are coming!"

They had recognized in the squire one of those terrible Almogavars, the forerunners of the famous Spanish infantry of after times, men who never gave back, and who could not be slain save from afar.

Thus it happened that in less than three minutes two men had scattered a dozen, before Aben Amar could collect his senses and think what to do.

But no sooner did the Moors begin to flee than their leader galloped after them, shouting to them to stop, and they were too much accustomed to his voice not to obey it.

They paused and collected in a group with Aben Amar, at a little distance, while the two Christians were congratulating themselves on their easy victory. As for the slaves with the mule-litters, they had taken the attitude of non-combatants, all the world over, huddling in terror, and ready to go over to the victorious side, whichever it might be.

"Well, Pepito, we have beaten the accursed unbelievers," cried Don Gonzalo cheerfully.

"Ay, ay," was the rather gruff reply. "I always was a fool, as my master knows. Now we've broken the truce and made enemies of all we meet. We may as well go on, and find who are in those litters. I misdoubt me 'tis the Maiden Tribute; and if so, 'tis a bad day's work for us."

"The Maiden Tribute! What mean'st thou, Pepito?"

"Your worship shall soon see," was the dry answer, as the squire pointed to the nearest litter.

Gonzalo dismounted from his horse and approached the equipage, then and now common in Spain.

A body like that of a modern barouche, but more highly ornamented, was swung on shafts between two mules, with silk curtains in place of windows.

As Gonzalo approached the litter, these curtains parted, and a girl looked forth and said:

"Oh, sir knight, as thou art a good cavalier, rescue a distressed damsel from the power of the Moor."

Before Gonzalo could answer he heard a loud warning cry from Aben Amar who had rallied his group of Moors within hailing distance.

"Beware what thou doest, Christian. Profane not the harem of the successor of the Prophet. These are the Maiden Tribute, sent by thine own king to Cordova."

"What means he?" asked the young knight, amazedly.

"He means that in these litters are twenty noble maidens of Christian blood, tamely given up as a tribute to the Caliph Haschem by the king of Leon," answered the girl who had just spoken.

Gonzalo started and his blue eyes flashed.

"A tribute to the Saracen!" he cried. "Christian maidens to swell the harem of a misbelieving Moor! Now by the glory of the blessed Virgin this shall not be! I, Don Gonzalo Gonzalez, will rescue ye from the Moor. Ye shall all go back home again."

"Oh thanks, most noble knight," was the delighted reply. "Surely it was Heaven that sent thee to save us."

Don Gonzalo bowed low before the lady and respectfully kissed the hand she extended to him, when Pepito uttered a cry of warning.

The knight's back was turned to the Moors, and Aben Amar had suddenly set spurs to his horse and was coming down at full speed, with his six remaining companions, all having their lances couched. Don Gonzalo turned to run to his horse, but it was too late. They would be on him ere he could reach it.

Then it was that grumbling Pepito showed what he could do against an armed horseman. In a moment he had stepped forward and firmly awaited the shock, all naked as he was. As he had noticed, Aben Amar was in front of his men, and right before him sprung the audacious Almogavar.

It seemed mere foolhardiness, but he stood there, his spear presented, the heel against the ground under his foot, the point slanting upward.

As Aben Amar came sweeping down, the undaunted squire made a stoop forward, lowering the point of the spear, and the next moment the swift Arabian came on the sharp blade, spitting itself and falling headlong, while Aben Amar was thrown over its head.

In an instant Pepito had dropped his spear, drawn his great knife and stabbed the fallen Moor to the heart, just as the others, appalled at the sight, faltered, turned, and fled for the last time, deprived of their leader.

"There, my master, I told you I was a fool,

meddling in quarrels when I should be looking at my master fight. But methinks 'twould have been a bad day for the foolish knight had not the foolish squire been here."

This was all that Pepito said as he slowly pulled out his spear from the fallen horse, and his remark appeared to nettle his young master, who inquired:

"And whom callest thou a foolish knight, Pepito?"

"Faith, I call him foolish that leaves fighting while his foes are in the field," was the dry answer. "All the knight's armor could not keep out the Moor's lance, had not the fool squire been here, with his naked breast and his spit to roast Moors."

The young knight looked down at the fallen Moorish leader and saw the force of his squire's words. Bowing to the lady, he retired to his horse, and it was not till he had resumed his lance and mounted his war-steed that he again approached the ladies' litters.

CHAPTER II.

THE STAR OF CORDOVA.

THE Moors had fled, and the two Christians remained victors of the field; but what were the spoils?

The heart of Gonzalo beat high as he approached the train of litters and rode down the line, speaking to the fair occupants.

As he had heard, this was indeed the Maiden Tribute exacted by the powerful Al Mansour every year as the price of immunity for the kingdom of Leon from the raids of the Moorish army. A hundred thousand pieces of gold for the treasury, and twenty beautiful damsels for the Caliph's harem—heavy as this tribute was to the sterile state of Leon, the king paid it rather than lose all he had.

"But the counts of Castile disdain the tribute," thought Don Gonzalo, proudly, as he heard the tale from Pepito's lips; "and I am a Castilian. This tribute must cease, and these maidens must go back to their homes."

He rode down the line of litters, and every curtain was drawn back, while a perfect galaxy of bright eyes looked forth on the handsome young knight, who courteously saluted the captives and said:

"Fairest damsels, ye are all free from the chains of these accursed Moors, whom the Virgin confound. I am ready to escort you all to the nearest Christian castle to hold it for you against all the Moors in Spain."

But, much to his surprise, he did not meet everywhere with the rapturous reception he had experienced from the first maiden.

More than one looked coldly on him, a few sneered openly, and one black-eyed girl saucily answered him:

"We are truly beholden to thee, sir knight, for taking away our guards, and leaving us to the mercy of the Almogavar robbers of these savage passes. These ladies were quite satisfied with their lot. Be pleased to ride off somewhere and exercise thy wits to better purpose."

Don Gonzalo was thunderstruck. Brought up in a lonely mountain fortress, he had seen nothing of the world till his father knighted him and sent him abroad to seek glory.

"Is it possible, then, that I have offended the noble lady?" he stammered.

"Thou hast meddled with what concerned thee not," was the sharp answer. "Dost thou think a king will go to war with Al Mansour to please one knight, too poor to mount his squire on a horse?"

Don Gonzalo flushed crimson.

He was young enough to be keenly mortified at the taunts of a pretty girl, and he felt that his rough, half-clad squire did indeed look but a rude companion for a gentleman.

"Aben Amar was a noble and gentle knight," pursued black eyes; "and that savage brute has slain him. He could play on the lute and sing sweetly, and he knew all the learning of Arabia, while thou canst not so much as read."

Gonzalo blushed deeper than ever, as he stammered:

"But I am a Christian, and he was but a heathen, sweet lady. I thought that I did well to rescue distressed damsels."

"Did they ask to be rescued?" was the puzzling question of black eyes. "Who told thee that we did not prefer the mosques and gardens of Cordova to the rocks and wild swine of Castile?"

Gonzalo drew himself up. It was not possible for a knight to answer a lady rudely, no matter how she might abuse him; but his voice had a tone of proud humility, mingled with irrepressible mortification, as he answered:

"I crave the noble ladies' pardon, and will do whatever they please. Let them signify their wishes. It is for me to obey them."

Black eyes smiled more graciously on him as she said:

"Help me from this litter, then, sir knight."

In a moment Gonzalo, forgetting the prudent counsels of his cautious squire, had thrown down his lance and sprung from his horse, when he assisted the black-eyed lady to descend.

She was perfectly beautiful in form and feature, though so small that she seemed little

more than a child. Her great dark eyes were like those of an antelope, and her oval face was aquiline in contour, but marvelously delicate and beautiful. She was richly dressed in the Moorish fashion, with a perfect load of gold and jewels, in the form of necklaces, ear-rings, bracelets, anklets and finger-rings, and her veil was drawn aside for the time.

Gonzalo was so much dazzled by her beauty that he remained staring wide-eyed at this little fairy, till she laughed merrily and said:

"Well, sir knight, hast thou never seen a Morisco maiden before? Do I look like one of those Infidel damsels of whom thou hast heard, who devour gallant knights and have converse with the Evil One?"

Gonzalo felt a sudden tremor seize his heart as he looked at this bewitching little creature. It was as if some one had struck a knife into him, a keen feeling of physical pain and a foreboding of evil to come to him from this Moorish maiden. Yet it was with a sense of delight and almost intoxication that he bowed low before her and answered:

"I had heard that there were Houris in Paradise, but I knew not that they came on earth in our days."

The girl laughed again in silvery tones and held out her hand to him, exclaiming, as he knelt and kissed it devoutly:

"Well done, sir knight. We shall civilize even you rough men of the mountains in time. Come, let us see our sisters in trouble."

She tripped round on a visit to the different litters, and very soon all the occupants had descended to the ground and stood in a chattering group.

Gonzalo withdrew to one side in respectful silence, not to interfere with the ladies' deliberations; and Pepito came to his master as he leaned against his horse and began his usual grumbling but humorous comments:

"Now, indeed, are we a pair of fools, master mine. One woman can send a wise man crazy if she will; and here are twenty-one, to do with us as seems best to their flightinesses."

"Twenty, Pepito, not twenty-one," answered Gonzalo. "The tribute is twenty damsels."

"There are twenty-one here with the Moor maiden," answered the squire, obstinately. "Unless I much mistake, she is not one of the captives, but rather one sent to persuade them into going willingly without grieving for their homes."

Gonzalo looked more closely at the group of ladies. He noticed, for the first time, that there was a mingling of Moslem and Christian fashions among them, in as great a variety as the complexions of the wearers, but that the black-eyed lady was the only pure Morisco among them, and that her dress was the most splendid of all. She seemed, from the way in which she spoke to the rest and was addressed by them, to be a sort of leader, and most of the girls seemed to admire her greatly.

The only exception to this rule was the damsel who had first spoken to Don Gonzalo. She remained apart from the rest with a mournful look on her face, and Gonzalo noticed that she almost alone retained the Christian fashion of dress unaltered.

As he looked at her he also became aware that there was a certain resemblance between her and the Morisco maiden in form and features. Both were small and slight in figure, both had delicate aquiline features, but one was dark, the other fair. The Christian maid had great, serious blue eyes and long braids of fair hair, that contrasted forcibly with the raven locks and dark orbs of the beautiful Moslem.

While he was watching them the group broke up, and the Moorish girl came tripping toward him with a bright, gracious smile on her face that fairly dazzled him.

"How say you, sir knight," she asked playfully, "is it not true that you Christian warriors are always ready to obey a lady?"

"It is a knight's duty and pleasure to fight and die for the fair," answered Gonzalo, dazzled and bewildered, but trying hard to appear at his ease while a score of pretty girls were smiling furtively at his confusion.

"And why then is it that I see thee with no lady's favor in thy helmet?" she asked in the same half mocking tone.

"Because no lady has deigned to take me for her knight," was all Gonzalo could answer, his face crimson with modesty; for most of the girls were tittering.

"But supposing that a lady should take pity on thee," pursued the girl saucily, "who should insure that thou wouldst be her true knight?"

Gonzalo looked at her with eyes that blazed with ardor. The young knight had met his fate, and all the tittering girls seemed to fade out of sight in an instant. He made one step forward, his hands clasped, and fell on one knee with clanking armor before the mocking beauty, murmuring in tones of earnest passion:

"Oh, sweetest lady, I would lose all the world to bask in thy smile. Try me and see."

The little lady recoiled a step and looked at him as if she were half frightened. The evident consuming fervor of the handsome boy pierced through her air of frivolity and she read his love in an instant.

"Nay, nay, I did not mean—" she began, stammering as much as he had done a moment before and not able to withdraw her eyes.

But here in a moment a bevy of laughing girls had pounced on her and led her forward; while others—saucy creatures—surrounded the young knight as he knelt and a dozen sweet voices cried:

"Zoraya's knight! It shall be so. See what a noble knight she has found."

And before Zoraya, now crimson in her turn, could resist, they had half forced her forward to Gonzalo, and the mischievous girls cried:

"Kiss him, Zoraya; make him thy knight."

As for Gonzalo, he did not dare to stir, and presently he felt the touch of two soft lips on his forehead as he closed his eyes, and heard Zoraya's voice say:

"I take thee for my true knight by this token, to do my will against the whole world. Rise and obey me."

Then Gonzalo slowly rose to his feet, and saw that the girls had fallen back to a little distance, while Zoraya was smiling on him.

"Come," she said; "thou art my knight now, to do my bidding against all the world. Thou wilt obey?"

"Till death," replied the boy, softly.

"Then doff this stiff and awkward mail of the Christians, that my sight abhors, and take to thee the armor of Aben Amar. Thou shalt be Zoraya's knight from this day forth, and shalt take us to our home in Cordova, for I name thee Ali Moudara."

Gonzalo started and turned pale at her words as he realized their import.

"Take you to Cordova! Oh, lady, have pity! Remember I am a Christian."

"I remember that a true knight never breaks his word, Ali Moudara," replied Zoraya, in a firm tone, her face assuming an expression of severity.

Gonzalo bowed his head till he knelt before her, and softly kissed the hem of her garment.

"I will obey till death," he said.

Then he rose and went to the body of Aben Amar, which he carried away, assisted by Pepito, who had been looking on at the scene that had just transpired with sundry shrugs and grins.

The bluff squire had a fund of good-humor and philosophy that enabled him to bear any change of fortune with equanimity, but he could not restrain his freedom of comment as he assisted his master, behind a clump of bushes, to change his armor.

"Here are two fools that do not know their own mind, master mine. We were Christians awhile ago, and now we are Moors. 'Tis all one to Pepito as long as he has wherewithal to feast. Long live the Prophet!"

"Then must not think, Pepito, because I change my dress and name at my lady's bidding that I change my faith," observed the knight, sharply. "A knight gives his life for his lady; but his soul is not his own to throw away."

"'Tis all one, my master. And now what am I to do?"

"Thou art free to stay or go as thou wilt, Pepito. I ask none to follow me into danger, for I am bound to Cordova."

"Nay then, since the foolish knight runs his head into the trap, 'tis but just that the foolish squire should follow," replied Pepito. "I carried my master in these two arms when he was a child, and I will turn Moor with him. 'Tis all one to Pepito."

A few moments afterward, the ladies, still in a chattering group by the litters, were startled by the apparition of Don Gonzalo, fully equipped in the magnificent arms of Aben Amar, and followed by Pepito, turbaned and captailed in the dress of another slain Moor, but still retaining his rude weapons.

The ladies all clapped their hands in admiration at Gonzalo's gallant figure, and one of them cried out:

"Ali Moudara is handsomer than Aben Amar, and fit to be Zoraya's knight."

Ali Moudara, as he was now dubbed, advanced with dignity to meet Zoraya, and asked her orders.

"We will mount our litters at once and depart for Cordova," she said. "Is there any here that wishes to return to the barren rocks of this Land of Castles we have left?"

"Not I," "Nor I," cried several voices; but the little fair maid with the dark blue eyes stepped forth and said simply:

"I do. I love my home and this."

She held up a gold cross as she spoke; and an embarrassed silence fell on the giddy girls who had been so ready to abandon their humble homes, tempted by the glitter of Cordova.

"Then I swear by the head of the Prophet of Allah and by the virtue of Ayesh his favorite wife, that thou shalt be taken there by Ali Moudara, my knight," answered Zoraya. "Come with us, Panchita, and see our home in the South; and then, if thou wilt, thou shalt return with him."

"But how shall I know this to be true?" asked Panchita timidly.

"Because I am the daughter of the Commander of the Faithful," was the proud reply.

"I am Zoraya, the Star of Cordova, and when I

call on my father he will presently give me ten thousand horsemen to do my bidding. Wilt thou trust me, Panchita?"

"I will, because I must," was the sad answer.

"And thou shalt not repent it," replied Zoraya. "How now, my knight; what seest thou?"

She noticed that Ali Moudara and Pepito were peering out to the south, where a cloud of dust was approaching along the high road.

"Moors are coming, gracious lady," was the response of the knight.

"Then do thy duty," answered Zoraya. "It is for thee to take us to Cordova, spite of Moor or Christian; for thou hast undertaken the task. Here is thy warrant for all."

As she spoke she bound her green scarf on his arm, and waved her hand to him.

The ladies re-entered their litters, and the procession advanced again, the knight riding at the head on the Arabian charger taken from Abd Allah the Moor, while Pepito, as humble as ever, followed behind on the sober gray mule.

Before them rose the cloud of dust which told of a company of Moors, and the knight guessed that they had been summoned by the fugitives from the late battle.

If so, he had a deadly battle before him, one against numbers, with only Pepito to help.

Nevertheless, such was the influence of enthusiasm, love and chivalry, that the young warrior shook the long-plumed Moorish lance he bore, and laughed aloud for joy as he rode forward, murmuring to himself:

"My lady is the Star of the Morning. There is none like her, not one. I will win renown for her smile, and laugh at wounds for her sake."

And truly he seemed likely to get all the wounds he courted.

CHAPTER III.

ALI MOUDARA.

SWIFTLY approached the yellowish cloud, and before long the newly-named Ali Moudara and his squire could see the glitter of weapons amid the dust that told of the galloping horsemen.

The young knight hastily called to his squire: "Go back, Pepito, and lead the train of litters into the fields by yonder narrow lane, while I ride on and scatter these miscreants. Keep them in safety, as thou lov'st me."

"Ay, ay, my master," was the cheerful reply. "Your worship can scatter them easy enough now, for you have between your knees a horse worth ten of old Bermudo, that his worship the count gave you. How shall I know if your worship has beaten the Infidels?"

"I will come to thee, Pepito, under yonder cluster of palms that we can just see on the edge of the plain toward Toledo. Farewell."

He set spurs to his horse and dashed off at full speed, leaving the train of litters behind him, and rapidly nearing the oncoming Moors.

As he had expected, he soon recognized the figures of some of his old foes, but they were accompanied by a troop of fifty or sixty others, against whom it seemed, even to his wild and ungoverned valor, useless to struggle with any hope of success.

He turned in his saddle to look back, and became aware for the first time that the train had disappeared.

Instead of being on a hillside, from whence a fair view could be commanded, he was now far in the plain, in the midst of a densely-cultivated land, where groves of trees and fields of tall maize hid the prospect from sight, while the road wound hither and thither among a confusion of canals, cottages and vineyards.

Rash as he was, the knight saw that he could not hope to conquer the cavalcade in front of him, not to speak of the country round him, and it flashed on him for the first time that Zoraya's plan of making him change his armor, had been no whim.

As he thought of this he checked his horse, and presently the Moors came galloping up to him in hot haste, headed by a wiry little man with a white beard, who at once pulled up and accosted him hurriedly:

"Peace be with thee in the name of Allah, stranger! Who art thou?"

"I am Ali Moudara," answered the knight, remembering his lady's order as to his name.

The name seemed to surprise and awe the old Moor, for he bowed his head well-nigh to the pommel of the high saddle.

"Mighty son of a mightier father," he said respectfully. "I knew not that you were returned from Africa. Have you seen aught of a young Christian madman in rusty armor, who hath slain Aben Amar and carried away the Maiden Tribute from the Caliph's servants?"

"The Christian hath disappeared and I am the guardian of the Maiden Tribute, my friend," answered the young knight, who began to see that he was taken for some one else. "Ride back to Cordova, and give notice that we are coming."

He said this as a sort of experiment, hardly expecting the Moor would obey him, but the old

man immediately bowed lower than before, as he said:

"Praise be to Allah, the Most Merciful, that he has enabled my old eyes to see Ali Moudara, the Lion of the Rock. The ladies are safe under the shadow of his arm, and we may go home happily. Meer Haroun Abd-Allah salutes the Lion of the Rock."

So saying, before the youth could prevent him, the old man had seized and kissed his hand, while the other could only stammer:

"My father, I am not worthy. It is for me to kiss thy hand."

Nevertheless, it was not without great relief that he reflected that this clever ruse of war, no matter to whom it was due, had been the means of opening him a way to Cordova without any apparent difficulty. It was evident that Zoraya, under some freak of her caprice, had given him the name of a well-known and noble Moor absent in Africa. Meer Haroun Abd-Allah's words had told him that the real Ali Moudara, whoever he might be, was thought to be across the Mediterranean. Would he stay there long enough to enable the false Ali Moudara to perform his vow by taking Zoraya to Cordova and bringing Panchita back?

Thus revolving in his own mind, the young knight wheeled his horse and galloped back along the road to the place where he had bid Pepito take the litters into hiding, when he turned down the beautiful shady lane between a maize field and cotton plantation, both in early bloom, and cantered on till he was arrested by an irrigating canal running across his path.

He had been buried in such pleasant thoughts concerning Zoraya and the pleasant adventures promised him in outwitting the heathen Moors, that he had lost all note of time and place; and it was not till his horse stopped and thrust down its head to drink that the rider looked round him.

When he did, he started. He was in an unfamiliar country, and the lane had evidently come to an end in the canal, for there was no path up the other side.

And besides this, it became clear to him as he looked closer round him, that Pepito and the mule-train could not have passed that way, for there were no hoof-tracks in the mud.

Full of a vague sense of danger, he knew not what, the young knight hastily retraced his steps up the lane, and discovered, what he had not noticed as he passed before, a second lane, crossing and running through a number of fields into a walnut wood, some miles off.

The tracks of the mules were here plainly visible, and their appearance indicated that the animals had been driven at speed down the lane, while there was no sign of their presence as far as he could see.

Down the lane, winding to and fro through the fields went the false Ali Moudara, till he came to an open green plain, at the edge of which were scattered several cottages in the Morisco style, with flat roofs and mud walls. The knight almost ran over a Moorish peasant here, as he turned into the field, and of him he hastily inquired:

"Hast seen the train of litters? Whither have they gone?"

"On to Toledo," was the answer in a stupid amazed sort of way, while the man stared at him as if he had been a ghost. "My lord knows he gave the order himself."

The knight thought he remembered something of the sort, and hastily went on with his questions.

"Which is the way then? Does this path enter the highway beyond?"

"Surely, my lord."

Ali Moudara dashed the spurs into his horse and galloped on at a rapid pace, thinking only:

"If once I see them again, I will not let them out of my sight. I have left my sworn duty as a knight and I deserve punishment for it."

But ever as he galloped on, the hoof-tracks became plainer and plainer, till he entered the walnut wood. By that time the sun was already growing low in the sky, and he could still hear nothing of the mule-bells.

On through the wood he galloped, and presently heard the clatter of hoofs on hard stones, far in advance.

Then, just as the sun set, he saw the white high road in front of him, the hoof-trail leading plainly into it, out of the wood, while a peasant in a brown caftan and white turban was driving along a couple of asses loaded with firewood in fagots.

The new Ali Moudara rode by the peasant, who stopped and stood staring at him in such a dazed way that the knight reined up his horse and asked him:

"What's the matter, friend? Who art thou, and why dost thou stare at me so?"

"I am nobody but Hamet Abd-el-Akbar, my lord," answered the poor wood-cutter confusedly. "My lord has a noble horse. He can run better than the mares from the stud of the Prophet himself."

"Why dost thou say so, Hamet?"

"He has run so far, my lord! 'Twas but an hour since he was stabled in Toledo, and here he is—"

"Comest thou from Toledo then?"

"No, my lord, from the Mountains of the North, but I know he must have been there."

"Well, thou'rt wrong then."

And the young knight shook his bridle and galloped on toward Toledo, leaving Hamet Abdel-Akbar scratching his head in the road and muttering:

"How in Allah's name came he here, and what is he doing?"

Meantime the young cavalier rode rapidly along on the road to Toledo through the fast-gathering shades of evening, and could see no signs of the mule-train.

That it was ahead of him he could not doubt; but sunset faded into twilight; twilight into night; and the darkness of night was illumined by the faint light of the red moon disk rising over the trees before he heard in the distance the faint tinkle of bells that told him he was nearing the plodding mules.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SQUIRE'S BLUNDER.

WHEN Pepito, the squire, took control of the train of mules as his master rode forward to meet the Moors, he had no very clear idea of where he should go with them. Brought up among rocks and mountains, and using his sober gray mule merely to transport him from place to place, he felt lost in the plains, and quite bewildered as to what he should do with the bevy of beauties that had fallen to his lot.

He was a good-humored fellow, fond of his ease, and by no means emulous of glory and adventure; and he determined to keep as close to the mountains as he could, with the object of escaping thither if his master were driven from the care of the ladies, as he fully believed would soon be the case.

Pepito, as we have seen, could fight on occasion; but, unlike his master, he was not in love either with glory or beauty.

He turned his mule down the lane that Don Gonzalo had pointed out to him and then sat there waiting while the long procession passed him, the black slaves plodding patiently beside their mules.

This lane wound away to the south in the direction of Toledo, the most conspicuous object in sight being a clump of palm-trees about five miles off; and under these palms Pepito halted at last, and told the slaves to unsaddle the mules and prepare dinner for the ladies.

The stout squire was the more ready to do this, because he had noticed at the tail of the procession a number of heavily-loaded mules, which promised well for food and drink, and the event proved he was not mistaken.

The ladies were soon out of their litters and scattered over the grass, full of glee at their release, while the patient blacks were unpacking the hampers and lighting little fires, whereon the silver coffee-pots were soon simmering fragrantly away in the shade of the palms.

As for Pepito, he had said a word for the ladies and two for himself on the subject of dinner. He had never tasted, or even seen, coffee in his life, for it was only just coming into use with the Moors, and the Christians were unacquainted with it; but he had noticed the well-known outline of wine-skins on some of the last mules, and Pepito was very fond of wine.

Calling to him the slaves in his most lordly manner, the squire ordered them to bring him "something to eat and a wine-skin" at once, for he feared every moment that his expected feast would be interrupted by the arrival of his master, and Pepito believed in making hay while the sun shone.

The slaves were perfectly obsequious, for they feared the stout squire for his strength and fierce appearance; therefore Pepito was soon supplied with a pillau of rice, plenty of fruit, and a large goblet full of that delicious yellow wine of Xeres by which the luxurious Moors managed to cheat the Koran. The Book forbids the "wine that is red," and the Spanish Moors, having found the secret of making a yellow wine, could indulge in it without violating the letter of the law.

Pepito, as he ate his pillau and refreshed himself with copious draughts of wine, began to feel remarkable happy.

"The Blessed Virgin is a very gracious lady," he soliloquized; "but she does not supply her worshipers with food and wine like this. I must turn the Moslem to save my conscience: for my master has done it already, though he denies it. As if I could not see that he was bewitched with that Morisco enchantress! Well, here's her good health, and may I find one to do the same by me."

The squire continued to soliloquize and drink, to gormandize and wonder when his master was coming, each cup of Xeres, (now called sherry) tasting sweeter than the last, till it came to pass in time that he far exceeded the bounds of discretion, and drank himself fast asleep before the ladies had finished their dinner.

None noticed him, for they were too much occupied in discussing his master's absence, and thus he slept on—he knew not how long—till he

suddenly awoke with a snort and a start to find himself alone in the dark, with the moon hanging low in the western sky and a red flush just tinging the east; while a cold breeze, waving the palm trees, made him shiver in spite of himself.

Pepito sat up and stared round him in amazement. He had forgotten everything but the fact that he was cold, on account of the sudden change of his dress from leather to linen; and when he felt the soft thin folds of the Moorish caftan, which, with a turban, were his only garments, he could not at first think how he came to be thus scantily attired.

Then, as his dizzy brain began to recall the events of the previous day, he looked up at the palms overhead and remembered that he had promised his master to wait for him beneath those trees.

"And he has not come yet," said Pepito ruefully, as he rose to his feet and looked round him; "and where are the litters and the black men? Hallo! Hassan, Ali, Mahmoud, all of you! Where are you gone?"

His voice went ringing over the silent fields; but no answer came back; and Pepito realized that he was absolutely alone.

"They have left me!" he ejaculated, as this fact burst upon his mind. "I must find them somehow, or my master will surely kill me, and I shall deserve it."

With this thought in his mind, instinct prompted him to look for his spear and knife, which had been beside him when he went to sleep; but, to his renewed amazement, they too were gone. He was left defenseless and unarmed in a strange country, and began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

The chill of the morning air had entirely sobered him, and he turned to examine the country round him with a view to getting out of it as soon as he could.

The flush of advancing dawn was deepening and broadening every moment he looked; and it was already light enough to see the forms of objects near by.

Pepito saw that the grove of palms was entirely empty of people, the ashes of four or five little fires being the only signs of its late occupants.

The ground was all covered with hoof-tracks, and he came to the conclusion that his master must have come to the tree and ordered the train to start without noticing him, or else had left him alone as a punishment for drunkenness.

"And whichever it be, I'll follow him no more," said Pepito angrily to himself. "He may go to his Moors, but I am a good Christian and defy Mohammed and all his hosts. I will go home."

Buried as he was in dark fields and plantations, he could yet see the outlines of the Castilian Mountains to the north, and without more ado he set out toward them, as much to get warm by exercise as to extricate himself from what he began to think was a position of danger to an unarmed man.

For some time Pepito plodded on without keeping to any regular track; crossing fields, falling into drains, scrambling through thickets; till the advancing sun rose high enough to reveal the whole country around him, and he found himself in the open avenues of one of those large cork woods so common in Spain and Portugal.

He had entirely lost sight of the mountains; but kept along through the woods, thinking he was following a straight path.

Entirely unused to traveling in a country where no landmarks were visible, it was not much wonder that honest Pepito wandered on, hour after hour, and finally lost his way in the midst of a confusion of fields and vineyards, that told him he was approaching some Moorish settlement. He felt by no means desirous of coming among Moors in broad daylight, all unarmed as he was, at the hazard of having to explain his presence there, and he was skulking about in the edge of the cork wood, when he saw something coming through the arches of the forest that made him start with surprise and joy.

He recognized the figure of the fair-haired lady he had heard called Panchita, mounted on a gray Arab horse that had evidently belonged to some soldier; for a shield, bow and quiver, were hung on the sides of the saddle-bow, and the lady rode in manly style, with her feet in the broad shovel stirrups.

She was coming from the opposite direction, through the aisles of the cork wood, her horse ambling easily along, the lady looking sad and mournful. She had not seen the squire in his Moorish dress, and he took care to slip behind a tree till she was near by, when he suddenly sprang out and seized her bridle, saying in a subdued tone:

"Stop, gracious lady. You must indeed stop. You gave me the slip once too often last night."

The lady started violently when he sprang out, and she uttered a faint cry of fear.

Before she could make a motion to seize the weapons that hung at her saddle-bow, Pepito had snatched them away, together with a short spiked mace that was under the shield, and

was coolly arming himself, with a face of much satisfaction.

Then the lady clasped her hands and began to implore him.

"Oh, sir, if you are a robber, take pity on me and let me go. I am but a poor distressed damsel striving to escape from the power of the Moors."

"Faith; so am I," returned Pepito dryly. "I thought I was a good Moslem last night, but I'll stay Christian for the future, since my master and all of you left me."

The lady looked at him with surprise.

"Are you then truly a Christian?"

Pepito crossed himself.

"Will that show you?" he asked.

Then the lady brightened up.

"Then what dost thou here, and who art thou?" she said.

Pepito frowned and then laughed.

"Who am I? As if you did not know well enough, when my master and I killed those Moors in the pass yesterday morning. And then he changed his religion for the sake of that little witch with the black eyes, and took ye all to Toledo, I suppose, leaving me asleep in the palm grove. Of course you don't know me."

The lady looked more and more amazed as she listened to him.

"What? Was it thou who slept so soundly that the slaves could not wake thee, and so we left thee behind while we rode on?"

"It was indeed I, and I should like to know who ordered the move," was the sulky answer.

"Nay, I cannot say that. They told me it was thy master, and certainly he did not seem to care much afterward. He hath taken a new squire, my poor fellow."

"He has, eh?" answered Pepito, with a sullen, angry light burning in his eyes. "Be it so. I am then absolved from my allegiance, and free to go where I list."

"Then I charge thee, on thine honor and faith as a Christian, to aid me to escape to Castile," said the maiden, earnestly. "I am not what I seem. My father is the Prince of the Asturias, and it was only by an accident that I fell into the hands of Leonese foragers, seeking maidens for the annual tribute. Take me safely home, and my sire will make thee rich, good fellow."

"That will I gladly, if I can get home myself," answered Pepito, a little ruefully, "but in truth I have lost my way in these cursed plains and forests, and am helpless till I see the mountains."

"If that is all," the lady returned, "we are within a few yards of the highway to Burgos. I have not dared ride on it openly yet, but with thee to guard me I would not hesitate longer."

"And where is this highway to Burgos that you talk of?" asked Pepito.

She pointed a little to the left of the direction from which he had come.

"Out yonder," she answered. "This village before us borders on the road, and I had to ride round it for fear I should be stopped."

Pepito scratched his head, a rueful expression of face attesting his discomfiture.

"And I have been coming away from home when I thought I was going to Castile," he muttered. "Truly, I am not fit to take care of myself, not mentioning the noble lady here present."

"Nay, but I know the way well," said the lady, eagerly. "I looked out as we came through last night; for I had made up my mind to escape as soon as I could; and there is a straight road, when you once are on it. Ah! I need is a brave and faithful guard."

"And how did your ladyship get away?" asked Pepito.

"Our train halted in Toledo at the Governor's harem," she answered, "and I slipped out of my litter in the confusion and crowd, covering my face with my veil. It was dark in the shadow of the houses, and I was not noticed, so that I was able to reach a side street in the rear of some Moor's palace, where I found a group of horses tied up, all ready saddled. They belonged to some guard that was inside the house, and the soldiers had covered their saddles with their long cloaks to keep off the dew from their weapons."

"And you took a horse and rode away?" asked Pepito. "Now, by St. Iago, that was well and bravely done. But were you not pursued?"

"Nay, for I led the horse away so quietly that no one heard us," she answered, smiling at the recollection. "As soon as I was around the corner I put on the Moor's cloak, mounted the horse, and rode out to the gate, where I called out that I was a courier going to Cordova. They suspected nothing, let me out, and I rode all round the city till I struck the northern road, and here I am."

"And you left my master in Toledo," observed Pepito, thoughtfully. "Well, this truly is a strange world, lady. But yesterday he was Don Gonzalo Gonzales, son of the old Count of Lara, and to-day he is Ali Moudara, a Moor to the backbone."

The lady sighed deeply.

"It is indeed monstrous," she assented. "And yet he is such a gallant knight that I cannot find it in my heart to hate him. Would to

Heaven, brave Pepito, he had never seen that Moorish enchantress, for she hath cast a spell on him.

Pepito shrugged his shoulders.

"What can't be mended must be let alone," he answered. "Come, my lady, it is time we were on our way."

The lady making no objection, the squire led the horse through the woods in the direction she had indicated, and soon had the happiness of seeing before him the broad white Roman road which he had been so long seeking vainly, only to stumble on it when he least expected it.

As they came out on the road, it was almost noon, and the Moorish village to the south of them was all quiet, the inhabitants taking their noonday siesta, for the heat was already intense.

Pepito, after a keen look up and down the road, set off at a rapid walk toward the Castilian mountains.

The road before them to the north was quiet and deserted, and they could see it gently rising before them to the very pass down which Don Gonzalo and Pepito had come the morning before, when they met Aben Amar and the Maiden Tribute.

For several hours they proceeded quietly, Pepito feeling very hungry, while the lady sat, still and pale, on her horse, as if buried in deep and painful thought.

At last they saw before them in the distance a little cloud of dust, that seemed as if it was raised by a man on horseback, coming toward them out of Castile, and Pepito said joyfully:

"Yonder comes a good Christian, I hope. If so, my lady, you shall sleep in peace to-night within a castle where the people do not pray to a false Prophet. Yonder comes a good knight and true."

The lady brightened up at the news, while the distant horseman continued rapidly to approach them, and within half an hour was close enough to be recognized.

Then Pepito uttered a cry of the most intense astonishment.

"By the bones of St. Iago of Compostella," he exclaimed, "it is my master!"

The lady looked eagerly forward, and her face lighted up with a glad smile, as she murmured:

"It is he. He has forsaken his errors and returned to the faith of his mother. Thanks, Blessed Virgin!"

A moment later the young knight, still equipped in the graceful Moorish arms, and mounted on a magnificent bay Arab horse, drew up beside them and cried out to Pepito:

"Whither goest thou with a Christian maid, thou cowardly runaway?"

CHAPTER V.

PEPITO'S MASTER.

PEPITO grinned with honest pleasure in spite of this strange greeting, for all his displeasure vanished at the first view of his beloved master.

"Faith, master mine," he exclaimed, "I am taking the gracious lady home to her people. If none else will welcome her, the count your father will see that she is taken care of."

"To Eblis with thy counts and all Christian dogs," answered the knight, in angry tone; "knowest thou who I am, fool?"

"Right well, your worship," said Pepito, with his old humorous grin. "I did not carry you in my arms as a boy for nothing. You are Don Gonzalo Gonzales, son of the Count of Lara, and the man who slew all the Moors and carried off the Maiden Tribute yesterday."

The young knight turned red with anger, and his eyes flashed as he raised the butt of his long lance of cane menacingly.

"Thou liest, slave," he shouted. "I am Sheer Ali Moulara al Gebel, the Lion of the Rock, and I hold all Christians as swine. Turn back instantly, ere I smite thee to the earth."

Pepito looked at his master with a mixture of amazement and half-incredulous humor. Then he nodded his head in a wise manner.

"Your worship is trying me with a jest," he answered. "Methinks you tried me enough last night, and it served me right for getting drunk; but I say nothing. Your worship keeps up the part well."

With a cry of anger the young knight brought down the lance staff on his shoulders and drove the squire across the road, crying:

"Dog, darest thou mock me? Who am I now? Who am I?"

Pepito, like all of his peasant class, was too much used to blows from nobles to resist, and he ran from before his master, trying to shield himself with both arms, and calling out:

"Mercy, your worship, mercy! Your worship is a great Moorish chief, and the Christians are all swine. Long live the Prophet! Mercy, master, mercy on my poor shoulders!"

Then the knight desisted from his task and turned to the lady, who had covered herself with the heavy Oriental veil she wore, as soon as she perceived him coming. Her he addressed with the courtesy of a cavalier, and an easy grace much at variance with his bashful demeanor on the previous day.

"I hope the noble lady will pardon me that I chastized my slave in her presence," he said, bowing; "but in truth he had angered me greatly by his desertion. He left me to fight a crew of robbers alone only yesterday, and ran away from me like the slave that he is. Now I find him enticing a noble lady into the land of the Christians, and it is well that I came in time to rescue you."

For answer to this singular speech the lady threw back her veil and disclosed her beautiful face, glowing with angry regret.

"Oh, Don Gonzalo," she burst out, "is it not enough that you have yielded to the wiles of the enchantress Zoraya, and allowed Christian maidens to go unchecked to their shame, but you must even pursue me, who am innocent of all but a desire to escape the hated embraces of the tyrant of Cordova? Oh, sir, as you are a knight, I adjure you to let me go free, for I would rather you would pierce me with your spear than take me back to the infamy from which I have just escaped."

The young knight remained gazing at her, from the moment that she had lifted her veil, with a face that expressed unbounded admiration and wonder. When she had concluded, he made answer:

"Whatever else may be my duty, fairest maiden, it is the first pleasure of a cavalier of Cordova to do the bidding of a lady. I am thy slave, to go with thee where thou wilt; for Ali Moudara knows no law but that which he reads in the eyes of beauty."

The Christian girl returned his gaze with a wistful look, as she murmured in a low tone:

"He is indeed bewitched. Oh that I had the beauty of Zoraya, that I might win him back to the cross! He denies his name and calls himself Ali Moudara at her bidding."

The knight smiled softly as he replied:

"Nay, sweetest maiden, I would not be so churlish as to disobey thy lightest wish. Tell me only what name I am to bear and how I am to call thee, and I will be any thing and every thing."

"And forget Zoraya?" asked the girl, quickly with an eager flush.

"Nay, how can I forget Zoraya when I do not even remember her?" he answered gayly. "There are many Zorayas and Fatimas and Maryams, but thou art one, like the bird of the desert that dies on the flame to rise again in glory. Fairest of all mortals, tell me thy name, that I may dream of it night and day."

The lady blushed crimson before his ardent gaze. She had indeed felt the first pangs of love when she looked on the handsome face of Don Gonzalo the day before, glorified with the halo of heroism; but she had never believed it possible that he would break the chains Zoraya had cast around him. Now, however, there was no mistaking the eager love-light that shone in the eyes of the man before her.

"Oh, senor," she burst out impulsively, "the Blessed Virgin has indeed cleared away the mists from your eyes! I am Dona Francesca de Ximenes, daughter of the Prince of the Asturias. I was out with my merlin, hawking in the valleys near my father's castle, when I was suddenly seized by a rough band of soldiers, and carried away to the city of Segovia. The king of Leon was collecting maidens to send to Cordova for the annual tribute, and I was stolen to save his own people."

"The king of Leon is a cur, whom it were a good deed to scourge to the sea," observed the knight with an expression of bitter contempt. "Think you that the prince, your father, knows where you are now?"

"How can he? I have not seen him ever since that day three weeks ago. He must think me dead."

"And is the lovely Dona Francesca willing to trust her safety in the hands of an infidel Moor like Ali Moudara?" asked the knight with a smile of some archness. "Bethink you, fair lady, I may carry you off myself to some mountain fortress, where neither Caliph nor king can touch you."

The lady blushed crimson at the ardor of his language, and murmured:

"Oh, Don Gonzalo, speak not so, for I might be tempted to forget my father, and that would be sin."

The cavalier smiled again.

"Nay, nay, I will not play the robber chief when I can be a true knight. I will dare all the perils of the mountains and bring thee home safe, or leave my head in Castile."

"Oh Don Gonzalo," she said joyfully; "I knew when first I saw thee thou wast a true knight. Thou shalt be mine, if thou wilt."

The eyes of Ali Moudara glowed with pleasure as he ejaculated:

"Sweetest and fairest of ladies, I will make him eat his words that says that thou art not the one beauty of all the world."

She extended her hand to him with the frank impulse of a woman in the days when women were queens of society.

"Then swear that thou wilt forsake Zoraya," she said.

He pressed an ardent kiss on the little hand, as he answered:

"By this I swear that thou art better and

fairer than all the Zorayas that ever wore a veil."

"Then call me by the name my father calls me," said she.

"Call me 'Panchita,'* and swear thou lovest none but me."

"Panchita, I love thee; I love none but thee; and none other will I love till death," was the eminently satisfactory answer; to which Panchita replied:

"Gonzalo, thou art my knight. Be brave and true as thou lovest me."

All this while Pepito had been looking on in silence from the side of the road, wearing a very puzzled countenance.

Now that peace seemed to be restored, he came forward with his usual good-humored grin, and observed:

"All's well that ends well, master mine. A kiss is worth ten kicks any day. Where will your worship be pleased to go; and are we Christians or Moors this afternoon?"

"It was Panchita who made answer to him, in her sweetest tones:

"We are all Christians now, good friend; for thy master hath escaped the mazes of witchcraft, and we are going to wander whither we will, to see the world. Wilt thou go with us?"

Pepito looked at his master, who had not answered; and he scratched his nose in a doubtful manner.

"I would I could follow my lady to the world's end," he replied slowly, "but I know not whether my master has forgiven me; and if not, my poor shoulders would fain be excused from more familiarity with his stick."

The knight smiled.

"I forgive thee, Baba Moustafa," he replied more good-humoredly than he had yet spoken; "but beware of running away again in a fight. It is the servant's place to stand by his master, and those Almogavar robbers had nearly slain me."

Pepito stared hard at his master as if he doubted his senses, and turned away muttering:

"Where would he have been, had it not been for one Almogavar I wot of? The squire kills the Moor, and the knight wears the armor."

However, he made no audible comment to his master, except to ask:

"Since your worship has changed his name, I suppose Pepito must be some one else now."

The knight in his turn looked at the other with surprise, and then he frowned as he answered sternly:

"I have allowed thee too much freedom for a slave, Baba Moustafa; and thou presumeth on it with thy fool's jests. Get behind my horse, and be silent, satisfied that I do not kill thee for thy cowardice of yesterday. Where wast thou all night?"

"Sleeping in the palm grove, where your worship bid me stop," was the stolid answer. "I know not if the Morisco witch hath blinded your worship's eyes, but it seemed to me that I bore myself as a man yesterday, and earned the very armor your worship is wearing."

The young knight colored up and turned to Panchita, saying in a low tone:

"Sweetest lady, let us ride on. I am deeply grieved that my fellow should have disgraced himself so, but in truth this thirst for wine is a raging lion for some men. Come."

As he spoke he took her bridle and led her horse away, calling back over his shoulder:

"Baba Moustafa, for thy mother's sake, I forgive thee. Follow us when the fumes of the wine have left thee."

Then they rode away, leaving Pepito in the highway, growling to himself, stamping up the dust and cursing roundly as soon as they were out of hearing:

"Now, by the bones of St. James of Compostella, thou art a dumb ass, a mule, a swine, Pepito, to follow this fickle boy, who turns his coat every day, and is only constant to abuse thee all the while. I am not Pepito, forsooth! His little worship has forgotten my name and pretends to call me a slave and Baba Moustafa. And a coward too, forsooth! Now, by the mass, I'll follow him no more. Let the Moors have me, I'll be no squire to him. I'll go to the mountains and turn robber—"

His angry soliloquy had not hindered his watching the fleeing pair, and it was suddenly interrupted by a remarkable spectacle.

A swarm of dark figures had just darted out of the woods on either side of the road toward the pass, and Pepito recognized them at a glance as those savage desperadoes, called Almogavar by the Moors, and universally dreaded.

These men lived on the borders of Castile, sheltered from all hostile incursions among the almost inaccessible upper valleys of the Sierra Guadalupe. From these fastnesses they de-

*The Spanish diminutives of names are often very pretty and very unlike their originals. "Francesca"—our "Frances" (diminutive "Fanny" in English)—is turned into "Pancha," "Panchita," "Paca" and "Paquita," while "Josefa" becomes "Pepita," and "Maria de la Concepcion" is turned into "Concha."

The male diminutives follow the same laws, ending in "o," "Jose" being made over into "Pepe," "Pepito," etc.

scended whenever they needed food, plundering the Moors at all times and the Christians when they could do no better.

Their attire and general appearance were rude and savage in the extreme, and they were known to spare neither age nor sex in their savage forays. As soon as Pepito saw these savages dart out into the road, he began to laugh fiercely.

"Now, master mine, let us see how such a valiant knight gets on without his squire," he ejaculated. "There is no passage to Castile this day for thee."

In fact, no sooner did the wild Almogavars dart out into the road, than the cavalier and his companion wheeled their horses and galloped back.

But this did not satisfy the savages behind them: for no sooner did the knight turn than the Almogavars gave a wild yell of triumph and came running after him with the speed of wild goats.

In fact, these savage men were so little incumbered with clothing that they could run very fast, and for a few moments they almost kept up with the horses.

Then, just as the squire was beginning to tremble for his master's safety, the danger dissipating his anger, they stopped, dropped their long spears, and began to throw stones after the knight with great force and precision.

Now the squire could stand it no longer. Beaten and abused as he had been that day, there was yet a warm corner in his heart for the master he had carried in his arms; and he bethought him of the Moorish weapons he wore. In a moment more he had drawn the bow from its case outside the quiver and began to shoot at the Almogavars nearest his master. These rude warriors had neither shields nor armor, and were only formidable against a charge of cavalry.

Before he had shot three arrows, they spied him from the effects of his archery, and came running at him, leaving his master alone for the nonce.

A little later, the knight and Panchita came galloping by, and the cavalier cried out:

"Run thy best, Baba Moustafa. I forgive thee all now."

"But Pepito's blood was up, and he heeded not. He had shot four of the Almogavars dead, but a dozen more were not a hundred yards off, yelling fiercely.

CHAPTER VI.

A LOVER'S QUARREL.

WHEN a strong man shoots his best, he can discharge a good many arrows in twenty seconds; and before the pursuing Almogavars could reach Pepito, five of them had fallen on the highway, pierced through with the Moorish arrows that the squire was shooting.

Then, just as the foremost was within fair striking distance, Pepito turned round, swung forward the round buckler he had taken from Panchita's horse, and fled like a deer for about fifty yards.

He looked over his shoulder; saw that the Almogavars were strung out in pursuit, and moderated his own pace.

Uttering a triumphant yell, the foremost of his pursuers began to gain upon him, holding his long spear at a trail, when Pepito grasped the short mace he still carried and suddenly turned on him.

The Almogavar made a savage thrust at him with the spear, and Pepito as promptly dashed the point aside with his hard shield, leaping within his opponent's guard.

Once there, the active peasant gave his pursuer one blow with the heavy spiked mace, stretching him on the road, senseless or dead, and then sprung on to meet the next. He had almost reached him, when, much to his surprise, the whole body of the Almogavars turned and fled to the woods, uttering loud cries of warning to each other, a panic which was next moment explained by the thunder and clatter of hoofs in the rear, as a large body of Moorish *kiaschefs*—the medieval substitute for our modern mounted police—came tearing up the road, headed by Pepito's master.

A moment later, they had passed him and were sweeping the woods ahead, hunting out the Almogavars with a force that defied resistance, while Pepito's master pulled up his bay horse by the squire's side, and held out his hand, saying:

"Well done, Baba Moustafa. Never again shall thy master call thee a coward. Thou art as brave as Rustam."

Pepito looked up proudly, the tears in his eyes.

"Master mine, how could I leave you? Call me what you please. I am a fool and always will be. I am Baba Moustafa or Hassan or Ali, or anything you like, so that you do not call me a coward and beat me."

"I'll never beat thee again, Baba," said the knight, heartily. "Thou shalt come with me to Cordova and there I will give thee thy freedom and make thee my steward; for by the

beard of the Prophet thou art too good to be a slave."

Pepito stared at his master and then nodded his head wisely.

"I see, I see. Your worship is quite right. It will not do to let these Moors know who we are. I am Baba Moustafa, for we cannot get back to Castile this time."

"No; thanks to those Almogavars, we must go round another way," said the knight, thoughtfully. "These *kiaschefs* must not see a true believer take a Christian maiden out of the Caliph's dominions. Let us go, Baba."

Without making further objections the squire followed his master down the road to where Panchita, now closely veiled, was sitting on her horse, watching the result of the late battle.

"Sweetest Panchita," here said the knight, "thou seest the fates are against us to-day. We cannot reach Christian territory till the *kiaschefs* are out of the way. They would stop us as well as those Almogavars. If you will deign to accept the hospitality of a poor Morisco cavalier, I have a little castle near here where you can repose for a few days till I am able to take you back. Will you trust me?"

Panchita looked troubled and anxious. She hesitated a while and then replied in faltering tones:

"I have no one else to trust now, but oh, senor, be true to me. Is there no convent of holy women to which I could repair for a little while, till I could send word to my father that I am alive?"

The knight reflected a while and then answered slowly.

"There is one in Toledo itself, for we Moors, as you should know, have not persecuted your Christian churches. Will you go there?"

Panchita looked longingly toward the dark and sterile mountains to the north, that she knew hid her home from view, and then on the smiling country around them, where every field was a garden of flower and fruit. The temptation to stay was great, but she sighed deeply as she said:

"If I must, I must, but I would I could send word to my father."

"If the gracious lady wishes, I will take a message from her to the noble cavalier, her father," said Pepito at this juncture, and his master smiled approvingly on him.

"Well done, Baba. You shall go for the lady. That is the true spirit I have tried to teach thee so long."

Pepito grinned furtively.

"Your worship is as fond of a joke as ever. I can get through the pass now, I think, for our Moorish friends have chased the Almogavars away; but I shall have to change my dress to reach Burgos, and I must travel by night."

"But will not those terrible men follow you?" asked Panchita, anxiously.

"No, gracious lady. They are after plunder, and I have nothing but hard knocks to give them. Where shall I go, and what message shall I take, my lady?"

"Here is a letter," said the girl, drawing it from her bosom. "I wrote it by stealth, when we stopped at the castle of Ruy Velasquez, before we reached the pass. What ails thee, sir knight?"

She broke off abruptly, for the young knight had started violently at the name of Ruy Velasquez, and was looking anxiously at her.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered, "only that you spoke a name I had been taught to hate."

Panchita looked surprised. "Ruy Velasquez? Don Rodrigo of the Wizard's Castle?"

"The same. My mother taught me to know that name when I was a child, and told me that the day would come when I must slay that wicked knight."

"That is strange," observed Panchita, thoughtfully. "Don Rodrigo married the cousin of the Count of Castile, Dona Lambra, and is reputed a gallant and noble knight."

The young cavalier contracted his brows with an expression of pain and anger as she spoke.

"There is the other name," he muttered, as if to himself. "Lambra, the Witch of the Castle. Where is this place?"

"Not ten hours' ride from here," she answered promptly, and looked wonderingly at Pepito for an explanation.

The squire seemed to be affected much in the same manner as his master by her words, but he avoided her glance and looked furtively up at the young knight.

Presently Ali Moudara roused himself from the bitter reverie into which he had fallen for a while, and forced a smile, as he said to Panchita:

"Will the fairest damsel in the world pardon her knight that he had for a moment doubted his duty. I will take thee into Castile at once, on the peril of my life. It shall not be said that Ali Moudara let a slave do what he would not himself. See, the shades of evening are advancing, and we can clear yonder pass by midnight, while the Almogavars are still scattered. Let us go at once."

Panchita joyfully turned her horse's head to the pass.

"Better a thousand perils at home than safety

in the land of the stranger," she cried, fervently. "Now we are indeed escaped from Zoraya's snares."

Pepito made no objection. The fact was that the honest squire was in a state of stupefaction at all he saw and heard. He saw his master before him, and yet this master acted differently from anything he had ever seen him do before. Form, feature, dress, were all there, but something in the expression was different, and honest Pepito began to think that his master was bewitched.

The squire was ten or twelve years older than the knight, and had heard in his youth of a terrible tragedy connected with the family of Lara, in which Ruy Velasquez, just mentioned, was implicated. He knew, or at least believed, that this matter was utterly unknown to the young Gonzalo, but the sudden emotion displayed by the knight showed him that his supposition was wrong, and he was puzzling his brain to find out how the facts had come to his master's ear.

Cogitating thus, he followed after the pair on foot, wishing much for his sober mule to save his limbs, and thus the little party proceeded at a walk up the road, passing the scene of the late conflict, and meeting the Moorish *kiaschefs* coming back from their pursuit of the Almogavars.

Pepito noticed that these men saluted his master with gestures of the most profound respect, and their chief said to him:

"Valiant Emir, it is not safe to go further up this road. We have chased the Christian dogs to their holes in the rocks, and slain ten of them, but Allah has given the plain to the Faithful; the rocks to goats and Christians. Tempt not the mercy of the Merciful by going further that way."

The knight smiled faintly.

"Know'st thou not, Meer Haroun, that I am Sheer al Gebel, Lion of the Rock? I have made a vow to strike my spear on a Christian gate ere I return to Cordova, and I must keep it. Lend me a horse for my slave, Baba Moustafa, and take this jewel in payment I pray thee."

The Moor bowed low as he took a magnificent ring which the other held out.

"Mighty Emir, there is Hassan al Hayzari's mare. Her master has but just flown to Paradise and your slave can take her."

He pointed to a gray mare that was being led by one of the *kiaschefs*, and it was soon turned over to Pepito, who mounted the easy-paced animal with much satisfaction and followed his master and Panchita.

The Moors seemed much surprised at the departure of the little cavalcade, but they made no opposition; and within half an hour after, Pepito saw before him the scene of the battle of the previous day, still marked by the bodies of the slain Moors and the dead horse of Aben Amar, while the *kiaschefs* were entirely out of sight in the woods below.

It was evident that the Almogavars or other robbers had been at work here, for the bodies were all stripped.

Pepito's master drew up his horse a moment to look at them.

"Here has been trouble, Baba," he remarked thoughtfully. "Those men were slain lately. Have the Almogavars been here too, think you?"

"Your worship should know," the squire answered dryly. "This is none of my handiwork, save only the horse and one rider."

The knight looked at him sternly for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and rode on, observing:

"No matter, Baba. Thou always wast a great liar; but I forgive thee since this afternoon. Let us be on our way."

Panchita, as they rode on, drew up closer to her knight, and said in her soft cooing tones:

"Why dost thou laugh at poor Pepito, sir knight? Surely I saw his deeds and thine only yesterday. Meseemeth this disguise is kept up too long for courtesy."

For the first time in his intercourse with the lady, the cavalier exhibited symptoms of irritation, though he never lost his courtesy.

"And meseemeth also, fairest damsel," he answered in turn, "that if there be any witchcraft here, it is cast on me this day. My slave talks riddles to me, and thou joinest him in the assault on a poor knight who only strives to do his duty."

Now, Panchita began to be irritated too, for there were lovers' quarrels in those days as well as in our modern times.

The dove-like maiden drew herself away from the knight in offended silence, with the stinging remark:

"This is kept up too long, senor."

After that she rode rapidly on, keeping the other side of the road from her knight, and it was not till the shades of night began to close in on them in a valley of the mountains that she spoke again.

Pointing to a glimmering light far ahead, she observed, in her most sarcastic tones:

"Yonder lies the abbey of St. Ursula of Castile, senor, under the walls of the castle. I will not trouble your courtesy any further than the gate, when I will bid you adieu."

The knight bowed low. It was the privilege of a lady in the days of chivalry to abuse, snub and persecute her lover with caprice, without stint, and the laws of his order bound him to take all without a murmur.

"If my lady commands, I must obey," he said, sadly, and spoke no more till they were at the abbey gate and had rung the great bell.

Then he asked, respectfully:

"Has the fairest lady in the world any commands to lay on her knight, ere Ali Moudara leaves her in safety?"

"I have nothing for Ali Moudara, the infidel, but pity and sorrow," was the unyielding answer. "When Don Gonzalo, Count of Lara, has recovered from the spell of the witch Zoraya, and wishes to see Francesca Ximenes, she will be here, praying for his return to the faith of his mother. Farewell, señor. Tell Zoraya, when you see her, that all Christian maids are not to be corrupted."

As she spoke she sprung down from her horse without waiting for him to assist her, and in a moment more the abbey gate closed upon her, leaving the knight and squire alone in the dark.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHIMS OF A PRINCESS.

It is time to return to the Princess Zoraya and the Maiden Tribute, left as they were in charge of the careless squire (Pepito), to show how they had escaped him.

The Princess Zoraya, the only daughter of the Caliph of Cordova, was as gay and capricious as most spoiled children. She had never known her wish to be refused, and was always devising some new freak to amuse herself.

The position of women among the Spanish Moors was far above that occupied by the sex in the Eastern domains of Islam. Their constant intercourse, in peace and war, with the Christians, had tended to the benefit of both parties. The rude Goths of the mountains had learned courtesy and luxury from the Moors, while the Moslems had learned, from the usages of chivalry, to respect women and allow them greater freedom than was given them in the East.

Zoraya could read and write, and was versed in much of the science which the Arabs were the first to introduce in Europe, besides being a skillful musician and dancer.

All her accomplishments, however, did not change her nature, and she was still a giddy, heedless girl, fond of pleasure as any princess recorded in the Arabian Nights. She had entered the Christian territory under Aben Amar's escort to bring back the Maiden Tribute, as a mere whim, and had captivated all the girls that she had found at the castle of Ray Velasquez weeping over their expected exile among the Moors.

Panchita was the only one that did not yield to her pictures of the pleasures of Cordova, and the petted princess was set on overcoming the Christian maiden's mournful reluctance by every blandishment she knew. But the sudden meeting with Don Gonzalo had changed the course of Zoraya's whims, and she had almost forgotten Panchita in the pleasure of first love, all the sweeter because she was yet outside of Moorish territory and could gaze on a man unvailed without fear of exciting scandal.

No sooner had she and her young companions finished their repast under the palm trees, than Zoraya began to search about for some new adventure to pass the time till Don Gonzalo returned.

They found the poor squire asleep, and the gay princess, in her usual mad spirit of fun, determined to give him a fright by leaving him alone and taking along the train.

The black slaves were all ready to obey her, and in a very short time the mules were harnessed to the litters; Pepito's weapons slipped from him; his gray mule led away; when the whole train moved off at a trot down the lane toward the distant spires of Toledo, Zoraya and her young companions giggling in giddy ecstasy over the plight of their late guardian when he should awake.

For a full hour they kept along at a rapid pace, till they came to a field surrounded with Moorish cottages and vineyards, when the mules came to a sudden halt, and Zoraya heard a stern voice cry:

"What is this, ye sons of Eblis? Whither go ye in this fashion, with no guard or escort?"

The giddy princess immediately veiled herself, for she began to suspect that she had run into a scrape of some sort, and she heard the black slave of her own litter—the head of the procession—answer deprecatingly:

"It was the will of the lady Zoraya, the Caliph's daughter, noble Emir. We are going to Toledo."

"And who shall guard ye against robbers on the way?" asked the stern voice, which Zoraya thought she recognized.

She peeped through the curtains of the litter, and beheld before her the figure of her knight, his face stern and forbidding.

This was enough, for the giddy princess used to find her word law.

"What right has he to be angry?" she said to

herself instantly. "I'll show him that the Caliph's daughter is not to be questioned."

She threw open the curtains of her litter and looked forth, still closely veiled.

"Who dares to stop my train in my father's dominions?" she asked imperiously. "Is Ali Moudara weary of his duty that he raises his voice to my slaves? Retire, sir, and know your duty better."

The cavalier looked very much astonished, but did not lose his self-possession; for in a moment he had sprung off his horse and was bowing low before the litter, saying:

"Gracious princess, I crave pardon for my rudeness, but surely I thought that you might suffer some danger traversing this country, so near the Almogavar robbers, without a full escort."

"Had Ali Moudara attended to his duty we should not be without an escort," answered the little lady, pertly. "You will find your squire, sir knight, asleep under a palm tree by a spring, and I wish him and his master pleasant dreams. Drive on, Soudani."

She spoke to the slave at the head of her mule, and threw herself back on the cushions of her litter in a pettish mood, half real, half affected. She fully expected that the knight would remonstrate, but to her surprise he only bowed and replied:

"I thank the gracious lady. I have been looking for the rascal all day, since he left me in bad plight in the mountains."

Then, to Zoraya's intense surprise and mortification, he mounted his horse, waved his hand to the slaves, and cried out:

"On to Toledo, as the lady says, and trot the mules fast, or the gates will be shut ere ye reach it."

That said, he galloped away, leaving several rustics gaping after him and at the litters in manifest awe and wonder at the brilliant spectacle. As for Zoraya, she snatched the curtains of her litter close and burst into a flood of angry tears. Such an insult had never before been rendered to her, and it came all the keener for its novelty. She who had always been petted and adored, found herself on a sudden openly deserted by a Christian knight, whom she had honored above all other men. He had actually taken her at her word, and had gone off to look for a drunken squire, leaving the Caliph's daughter to take care of herself!

"Oh, if ever I see him again, he shall repent this!" she cried, clinching her tiny fists, her eyes flashing through her tears. "He was but a simple boy, a mere bashful stripling, this morning, and here he has assumed in a trice the airs of a Moslem soldier."

Merrily jingled the bells as the mules trotted on at speed, for the slaves were frightened at the last words of the cavalier, and hurried on through the slanting shadows of sunset toward Toledo.

Zoraya went on talking to herself in an indignant strain for some time, till the monotonous jingle of the bells began to soothe her into a sort of dreamy state, while her anger lessened. She lay back on her cushions and reflected:

"After all, what consequence is it? If I never see him again there is no harm done," merrily jingled the mule bells as the train trotted on.

"But he was so handsome," she pursued, "and he fought so bravely, and he was so respectful, and he seemed to love me so well. I saw it in his eyes as soon as he looked at me."

Merrily jingled the mule bells, as if in mockery and Zoraya began to cry again.

"Why did he take me at my word? I did not mean to send him away in earnest. What shall I do? I have driven him from me and I shall never see him again."

Merrily jingled the mule bells and her courage began to revive.

"Yes, I shall. He will come back. He was but trying me. He was angry at the trick I played him, and alarmed for my safety, and perhaps he is now riding behind our train to keep me from seeing him."

This thought inspired her so that she began to laugh, and looked out of the little window at the back of her litter. The train was winding round the curve of a wood and entering the highway to Toledo, and she could see the procession from head to rear and some way beyond.

But no cavalier was in sight. Then Zoraya, with a heart that beat strangely, parted the curtains and looked out on either side.

No knight was to be seen, nothing but the black slaves, trotting along beside the mules, their faces shining with the sweat of long exertion.

Yes, there was something more!

Zoraya gave a violent start as she saw it, then laughed triumphantly and drew her curtains.

"Ah ha!" she cried as she threw herself back on her pillows.

"So my lord was trying to cheat the Caliph's daughter and bring her to his feet. We shall see!"

She had recognized the stout thickset figure of the squire she had left asleep under the palm-trees. The man must have recovered his senses

and followed them in some way; for there he was, mounted on the identical gray mule they had led away, and bearing his spear and knife with all the air of conscious virtue that befits a man who has done his whole duty.

Now indeed Zoraya clapped her little hands in glee, as she thought to herself how she had discovered the trick her lover had played her.

"He has galloped back, roused up his lazy squire, driven him on in haste, and now is following us in hiding, that I may not see him. Very well, Ali Moudara, we shall see who will be sorry when we meet to-night."

Completely satisfied with this explanation of affairs, the giddy beauty began to revolve schemes for provoking her lover when she met him, and at the same time keeping him from running away again.

"It is lucky that I thought of naming him after Ali Moudara, the Lion of the Rock," she soliloquized. "He has gone to Africa and will not be back before the pilgrims come from Mecca, so that my knight can take his place till he returns. And then—"

"Yes, what then, Zoraya?"

The thought made her pause a moment; but she was too much used to adventure to let a possible future disaster daunt her.

"Never mind what then? Let it come. I'll find a way to make things go smoothly. Perhaps—who knows—I may make him a good Moslem, and make my father marry me to him. The Vizier Al Mansour has often said that it were good policy to marry our maids to Christian knights of high degree, and so sap the Christians' kingdom. It will be all right if Ali Moudara does not come back too soon. He is very like this Christian; but for my part I never liked him. He is too haughty and fierce. My knight is gentle as an angel, if he did lose his temper over my little trick just now."

Zoraya had seen the celebrated Moorish chief, Sheer Ali Moudara al Gebel, twice in her life, from the lattice of the harem box, when the Vizier Al Mansour gave a great tournament, and had thought him a handsome knight, but nothing more. It was the great likeness she had observed in Gonzalo to this Moorish knight that had suggested to her the daring scheme of making him enter Cordova in false guise.

Now she began to revolve plans to account for his presence in Toledo in the assumed character, and had concocted a scheme, marked by her usual ingenuity, by the time that the jingling mule bells had lulled her into a sort of doze, as the train kept on its way to Toledo.

She was suddenly awakened by the stoppage of the litter, while the voices of men were heard asking questions of the slaves, to which the latter replied as well as they could, for the men seemed to be angry.

Then she heard the heavy bass voice of the stout squire shouting out:

"Open the gate, ye fools! Do ye know no better than to keep the Caliph's daughter and her train waiting like a pack of fig merchants? Here comes my most noble master, Sheer Ali Moudara al Gebel, shall teach you all manners."

Then Zoraya heard a coarse laugh.

"Whose man art thou, child of a burnt father? Sheer al Gebel is in Morocco not here."

"Is he?" cried the squire in his loudest tones. "Here he comes himself, ye dogs; and I am Baba Moustafa, his favorite slave. Now what say ye?"

Then came the rapid gallop of a horse and the voice of the false Ali Moudara cried out:

"What means all this? Open the gate!"

Zoraya raised herself to peep through the curtains and listen smiling with eager interest:

"Now we shall see if he has his wits about him," she thought. "I can forgive him all if he deceives these guards without my help."

She saw that they were before the gate of Toledo, lit by a single swinging lamp in the cavernous archway, while a group of Moors, in their ghostly white haiks or cloaks, were clustered round the squire, holding up torches and spears.

Now these same Moors were falling back in awe before the glittering figure of the cavalier, who had just pulled up his smoking horse before the princess's litter.

The squire began to talk before the Moors could answer his master.

"Now, ye sons of Eblis, you will believe in my most valiant and noble master, the Lion of the Rock. Did we not scatter the Almogavar robbers to day, and rescue the princess from their infidel clutches, and are we not bound to take them to Cordova alone? Out of the way then, for I am Baba Moustafa, slave to the Lion of the Rock, who devours strong men as if they were lambs."

Zoraya laughed softly to herself and clapped her hands.

"Well done, Pepito," she murmured. "Oh this is a jewel of a squire, if he does drink too much wine."

She saw her knight advance and speak with grave authority:

"Enough, Baba Moustafa. Open the gate, kiaschefs. It is not meet the ladies should be kept waiting."

Then the Moors drew back respectfully, the

great gates swung open, and the long procession of litters passed into the dark streets of Toledo.

Once fairly inside, Zoraya looked forth from her curtains and distinguished the burly figure of the squire beside her litter, when to her intense amazement he leaned over to her in the dark and whispered:

"It is all right, gracious lady. I will tell him where to go, and he shall not be found out."

How or what was the difference Zoraya could hardly tell, but in that moment she became satisfied in her own mind that this squire was not Pepito, and that he was also acquainted with the imposture she was practicing on the Moors.

Who he was, and how he came by his mysterious likeness to Pepito, she could not settle in her own mind, but the discovery caused her no uneasiness.

Whoever this new squire was, he seemed to be a merry fellow, capable of intrigue, and just the aid she wanted for her audacious scheme.

Instantly she resolved to make a friend of this man, and bribe him to use all his wits in her service. She slipped off one of her rings and held it out to him in the dark, and the astute scamp took it as if it had been broad daylight. Then he nodded.

"I will see to it, gracious lady," he whispered, as he fell back, and then she saw the form of his master beside the litter as they rode on.

The knight came up close beside the litter and murmured in a low voice:

"Oh, Zoraya, how I have suffered! I missed thee, and have only just found thee at last. Ah, lady, how couldst thou be so cruel to the knight that adores thee?"

The girl laughed saucily.

"Indeed, a likely tale, sir knight. I did not leave thee. 'Twas thou that must needs ride off after a sleeping squire in preference to riding by a fair lady's side. I think that, were I right, I should send thee back to thy Christian home."

"That is the only thing I might not do," replied the cavalier, sadly. "I am thy slave till death, as thou knowest; but I may not leave thee."

Zoraya smiled in the darkness. The soft melancholy of his tone was music to her ear, for it is a fact that lovers are apt to rejoice in each other's miseries, when those miseries are caused by the idea of absence or banishment.

Then the train stopped before a large, dark building, and the squire, who had called himself Baba Moustafa, made a tremendous racket at the door with his long lance, roaring:

"Place for the noble Emir, Sheer-al-Gebel, guardian of the Princess Zoraya, and her ladies. Open, ye lazy dogs."

Zoraya knew the building as one of the Caliph's numerous palaces, and one of the stations at which she had expected to stop. Baba Moustafa seemed to be thoroughly acquainted with the place and its inmates, for in less than five minutes the train had entered the courtyard, the ladies had been escorted to the chambers of the harem by a crowd of obsequious slaves; when for the first time it was discovered that Panchita was missing.

Instantly all was excitement among the girls in the harem, but the impractical nature of the ladies asserted itself at once, and half an hour was wasted in a buzz of conversation, inquiry and conjecture, before Zoraya took the resolution of informing the head of the harem guards of the disappearance, and asking him to search for Panchita.

After another hour of anxious waiting the chief reappeared with the news that the lady had fled with a horse belonging to the Moorish Patrol, and had passed out of the gate to Cordova.

Then Zoraya stamped her little foot angrily and sent word that she wished to see Sheer Ali Moudara. The chief of the guards objected on the score of etiquette, but the imperious beauty overcame all opposition and the young knight was brought before her.

The Caliph's daughter looked very angry.

"So, sir, you have aided Panchita to escape, and are no doubt waiting your time to slip away and rejoin her. Be it so. I will not wait to be abandoned. Go, I dismiss you, and only on one condition will I receive you again. Bring me back Panchita, or never see my face again."

She waved her hand haughtily and retired, leaving the knight in a state of stupefaction.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BROTHERS OF LARA.

WHEN Panchita left her late defenders so abruptly at the gates of the Abbey of St. Ursula, Pepito could not avoid the dry observation: "If all women are as grateful as this one, your worship might better turn monk and forswear them."

His master uttered a deep sigh ere he replied:

"Speak not against her, Baba, I must endure all from her; for she is my lady."

The squire kept on his growling in the darkness to which they were exiled:

"A plague on all knighthood, if this is what it brings a man! Here are we, like a pair of

chickens shut out of the hencoop, and nowhere to roost."

Again the knight checked him gently.

"A true knight thinks naught of his body when his soul is sad, Baba. My lady is cruel and wishes me to deny my name and faith; therefore must I wait till she relents."

"Then I would that your worship would allow me to take mine own name," returned Pepito, stiffly. "We are away from the Moors now, and there is no reason why, in a Christian land, I should go by the name of a heathen slave, Baba."

"Thou sayest well, Baba," replied the knight, in a thoughtful tone. "It may be best, while we are here, to let thee take another name. What shall I call thee? Thou always hadst a ready wit to plan schemes."

"Your worship can do no better than call me by my own name, Pepito. It is plain to speak and to hear."

"Be it so, Pepito. Now let us go to the castle, since Allah has brought us beside it."

Pepito uttered a cry of amazed horror.

"The Wizard's Castle, master mine! The home of Ruy Velasquez! No, not there, for the love of St. Iago!"

"And why not, slave?" demanded the knight in his haughtiest tones, as if irritated at the opposition.

"For the love of your father, the honor of your mother, by the blood of your brethren slain by the Moor," cried the squire, in tones of earnest entreaty, "I do beseech your worship not to enter that accursed pile. Every stone is sealed with the stamp of the Evil One, and the mortar was slaked in the blood of Lara."

"And what is that to me?" asked the knight, coldly. "I that have neither kith nor kin, why speakest thou of father, mother and brethren? What is all the evil fame of this castle to me? I am a true Believer, and defy Eblis and all his angels. Let us go and see this Ruy Velasquez. I would know what manner of man is this my mother taught me to hate."

"As for that, it is soon told," said Pepito, eagerly. "I can tell your worship, ere we enter the castle and sully the honor of Lara by breaking bread with its deadliest foe."

"And who spoke of breaking bread?" asked the knight, coldly. "Thinkest thou that a Moslem would break bread with the man he hates? I will go to his castle and see the man face to face, that I may know if it be the same my mother told me of. Then we shall see what will happen."

"What will happen?" echoed Pepito, excitedly. "Treachery and murder will happen, as it did twenty years since. Your worship will be slain from behind without a chance for life, and the house of Lara will indeed be dead."

"And therefore thou fearest to come," was the reply, in a chilling tone. "Be it so, Baba; thou needst not follow."

He turned and rode away into the pale gloom of the low moonlight toward the dark pile of buildings that towered on the opposite side of the valley from the abbey, and was known far and near as the Wizard's Castle.

Before he had taken a dozen steps, Pepito was beside him, saying:

"Your worship shall see if I fear. We can die together."

The knight nodded his head.

"I thought thou wouldst come," was all he answered; and then they rode straight toward the castle.

They were soon under the fortress, which frowned over the valley from the summits of a dozen towers, flanking the massive walls.

Around the whole of the castle ran a deep and broad moat, full of water, in which the rising moon was reflected; and the drawbridge had risen into the air for the night, while the castle was dark and silent.

Making a sign to his squire to follow, the knight turned his horse and rode slowly all round the castle by the edge of the moat, examining the defenses.

The Wizard's Castle, as it was known throughout Castile, was a strong and well-placed fortress, as it had need to be from its position, close to the Moorish frontier; full in the path of the Vizier Al Mansour, in his annual raids through Christian kingdoms.

Built on a slight eminence at one side of the valley, it was surrounded by open country, in which no enemy could conceal himself. At a little distance away ran the rivelet named Chico, from which the moat was supplied with water; and here it was that Ali Moudara paused before a singular-looking structure on which the moonbeams shone with weird effect.

It resembled a miniature castle, but was elevated some six feet from the ground on a light frame of poles, and the castle itself was full of holes, and seemed to be made of worm-eaten wood.

"What is that, Baba?" asked the knight, in a tone of curiosity.

Pepito crossed himself and shuddered violently before he answered, in a low tone of horror:

"Does not your worship know? That is the *tablado* for which the Brothers of Lara suffered death. Curses on the witch Lambra and the

coward and traitor Ruy Velasquez that sent them to their fate!"

The cavalier looked sharply at his squire.

"Wilt thou never have done with thy riddles, Baba Moustafa? Who were these Brothers of Lara, and what have we to do with them?"

"If your worship has forgotten his own kindred under the spell of a Moorish enchantress, it is not for me to open his eyes," answered Pepito, sullenly.

His master frowned impatiently, and then laughed.

"Tell the story thine own way, then, Baba," he said. "Pretend that I know nothing of myself, and then say who were these Brothers of Lara, and what is this *tablado*?"

The squire shrugged his shoulders and nodded his head slowly in the same uneasy manner.

"Your worship keeps up the play better than I can; but I always was a fool. I will tell, if your worship will listen."

"That I will do willingly, Baba."

"If your worship would only call me Pepito, it would feel much better to me."

"Go on, then, Pepito. Who were these Brothers of Lara?"

"Your worship knows that Don Gonzalo Sanchez, Count of Lara, married Dona Sancha, sister of Ruy Velasquez, who owns this accursed castle before us. The count became the father of seven noble sons, from Fernan, the eldest, to Gonzalo the youngest."

"Go on, Baba—I mean Pepito," said the knight, as Pepito paused.

The squire looked at him steadily as if he were amazed.

"Does not the tale seem familiar to your worship?"

"Not a whit, Pepito. How should it?"

Pepito shrugged his shoulders and gave a sigh ere he resumed:

"Dona Sancha's sons were grown to manhood when their uncle, Ruy Velasquez, took him for a wife Dona Lambra, sister of the Count of Castile. The seven young men, the Brothers of Lara, were invited to the wedding, which took place at this very castle twenty years ago."

The knight looked round him with interest.

"This, then, is the castle of which I have heard my mother speak, where dwells Lambra, the Witch."

"Ay, senor, and a witch she is. They set up this *tablado* that we see here in honor of the festivities, for the knights to cast the *jereed*,* and one Alvar Funez, a cousin of Dona Lambra, had struck the little window in the tower that was to be the mark, nearer than any of them. The bride was full of joy that her kinsman should win the prize. And then came young Don Gonzalo, the youngest of the Brothers of Lara, being but a lad of sixteen, and beat them all; for he cast his dart so that it entered the window, touched the spring that held the structure together; and the *tablado* fell to pieces."

"Well done, Gonzalo!" cried his master heartily. "And what said the knights when a boy beat them all?"

"Some applauded; but Alvar Funez was furious and swore that Gonzalo's dart had not been thrown, but pushed like a lance. Then the boy grew angry in turn, gave him the lie and broke his teeth with a blow."

"This Gonzalo had spirit, meseems," observed the cavalier thoughtfully.

"Ah, my master, they were all noble boys. How well I remember them, for I was their servant then, though only a boy myself."

The knight stared at him in surprise.

"Thou their servant! Why, Baba Moustafa!—but never mind. Go on. Of a surety thou wast born under a star of lies. Go on, Pepito."

The squire did not notice the sarcastic emphasis of his master, for he seemed lost in his own memories. He went on in a dreamy tone as if trying to recall the past.

"Dona Lambra never forgave that blow, though the counts of Lara and Castile prevented an open quarrel. She bided her time, and vengeance came at last. The old Count of Lara was sent by the King of Leon on an embassy to Al Mansour, the infidel Vizier, whom St. Iago confound—"

"Hold," interrupted the knight sternly. "Tell thy tale as thou wilt, Baba, but beware of slandering the great Al Mansour, for I owe him all I am."

Pepito bowed his head.

"I will remember, master mine. After all, the Moor was not to blame so much as the Christian. Dona Lambra sent to the Vizier a secret letter, by which she warned him that the count was a spy, whom the King of Leon wished to be killed; and that his sons would lead a raid into the Moor's domains while their father was talking peace at Cordova. Then she feigned friendship for them, and Ruy Velasquez led an army toward Cordova, with the Brothers of Lara among his chiefs. The boys thought their father had come back; but Al Mansour, on

* Jereed—A light spear of cane, to be thrown by the hand. The sport is still a favorite one among the Turks, Arabs and Moors. The Moslems introduced it in Spain, where it became naturalized among the Christians.

seeing the letter, had detained him as a prisoner, and the Moors surprised the army of Ruy Velasquez, who fled like a hare, leaving the Brothers of Lara to be taken by the Moors."

"This Ruy Velasquez was a villain," observed the cavalier gravely. "I begin to understand why my mother told me so, but not what injury he hath done me and mine."

"That will come soon enough," answered the squire significantly. "Your worship is not supposed to know what happened before you were born. The brothers of Lara would have been spared, but for Dona Lambra, who sent another letter to the captain of the Moors, telling him how the Vizier Al Mansour had commanded that they should be slain, with their tutor, Nuno Salido."

"Nuno Salido!" echoed Ali Moudara in a tone of recognition. "Why, Baba Moustafa, that was thy father, was it not? Surely I have heard the Vizier say as much."

"It needs no vizier to vouch for my father," answered Pepito, proudly. "He died, as I hope to die, true to Lara; for he had been with his old master at Cordova when Al Mansour imprisoned him, and the Vizier had let him go back to his own home."

"Yes, but he had been there many times before," persisted the knight. "I have heard the great Al Mansour tell how he had been a great traveler in his youth, and the Caliph had given him his slave Cadijah to wife, but the Christian fled one night to his own home, before thou wast born, Baba."

Pepito stared at his master, and then slowly replied:

"It may be so, your worship; but I can swear I never knew it, for my mother was no heathen slave, but a free woman of the Asturias, Aldonza Gomez by name."

The knight coughed slightly.

"Go on," he said. "We are in Christian lands now. What became of this old Count of Lara, who was left in the hands of Al Mansour, after his sons were slain?"

"Your worship, Al Mansour is not so bad as other Moors. He had meant to keep them all prisoners and restore them to freedom, but the work of the Witch Lambra had spoiled all his plans. When the seven heads were brought to him, they say that the Vizier was melted to tears, and at once released the poor count and sent him home."

"That indeed was like him," replied the cavalier warmly. "My brave protector, better than any father wast thou to me. And so the poor count was sent home. Methinks he should have sought out Ruy Velasquez for vengeance."

"Alas, my master, he was past sixty, while Velasquez was in the prime of life. What could he do but wait, till his son grew old enough to avenge his brethren?"

"Had he then another son?" demanded the cavalier in a tone of apparent interest.

Pepito stamped his foot on the ground with unconcealed anger at what he deemed an unnatural question.

"Your worship should know, unless this Moorish woman hath bewitched him entirely! Did we not both leave the halls of Lara, not ten days since; when Dona Sancha, your most noble mother, blessed you, herself, and sent you forth to win glory, while the most noble Count of Lara, your father, told me to follow you and never to let you know the wrongs of your dead brethren till we stood alone by the Black Castle? Here we are now, Don Gonzalo, child of Lara's gray hairs, and yonder is the home of your mortal foe, Ruy Velasquez. What should we do?"

The cavalier had remained staring thoughtfully at the bluff squire while he spoke, for there was something in Pepito's honest indignation that compelled respect.

When he demanded "What should we do?" the knight threw up his lance in the air and struck the *tablado* full on the window of the center tower with the point of his spear, crying out:

"This is what an honest knight should do, who hears such a story, Pepito."

The squire nodded his head like one well satisfied as the knight repeated the blow, and then the whole edifice of the *tablado* fell apart in a hundred pieces, while a bell in the castle began to toll loudly and shouts were heard from the ramparts.

The fact was that the two had been in full view from the ramparts all the while, and had become an object of much suspicion to the guards who patrolled the summit.

They had been seen riding silently round the walls and afterward to halt before the *tablado*. Therefore when that structure fell to pieces with a loud crash, the watchers began to tell the bell and call out the garrison.

The knight looked toward the castle and asked carelessly:

"Think you they will avenge this insult?"

Pepito laughed grimly in answer.

"Of course, my master; but two men in the open are worth ten in stone walls."

As he spoke the drawbridge fell with a crash, and a party of horsemen galloped toward them from the Wizard's Castle, shouting out all sorts of threats.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SQUIRE'S ESCAPE.

WHEN the young knight saw the horsemen coming in earnest, he turned to Pepito with a laugh.

"Now let us see what these clumsy Christian dogs can do," he observed, as coolly as if there were no danger. "Stay where thou art, and I'll show thee one of my best tricks."

So saying, he shook his bridle and galloped toward the enemy, waving his long, slender lance in the air and crying aloud:

"Allah Akbar! I am Sheer Ali al Gebel, the Lion of the Rock! Down with all Christian dogs!"

As for Pepito, he remained behind a moment, muttering:

"Surely he must have drank in some enchanted goblet, since I lost him, for he forgets everything and fancies himself a Moslem."

Then, as he saw that the enemy were at least twenty to one, he set spurs to his own horse and swung his short mace aloft to help his master.

At that moment he regretted, as never before, the loss of his old Almogavar spear, for he did not feel at home fighting on horseback, and would have vastly preferred the solid ground under his feet to the shovel stirrups of the Moorish saddle.

But long before he could come up with his master, the latter had suddenly turned, like a hawk on the wing, skirting the front of the group of Spanish horsemen, and Pepito saw the long plumed lance go darting through the air, as the cavalier cast it into the midst of his foes.

Then came a loud yell of agony as one of the horsemen threw up his arm and fell dead from his horse, pierced through and through by the flying lance.

The Christians wheeled in a body to pursue the audacious foe, and Pepito found himself behind them, for his master seemed to have entirely engrossed their notice.

This enabled the squire, mounted as he was on a swift Moorish mare, to come up with the heavier Christian chargers from behind, ere they had seen him, and to knock two men out of their saddles, senseless, with two taps of his spiked mace at the back of their heads.

Then followed a general *melee*, in which the Christians scattered in confusion before two men, but in which Pepito and his master, taking no heed of where they were going, became separated from each other, now pursuing, and anon pursued, as man after man came dashing out of the castle to help his brethren against the strangers.

Finally Pepito found himself so much over-matched in the contest that he was fain to turn his horse and trust to flight for safety.

His course took him down the valley toward the pass by which he had entered it that morning, and he had much ado to make his escape unharmed; for, while his mare was naturally much faster than the animals of his pursuers, she had been ridden hard that day, while their chargers were fresh from the stable.

However, thanks to blood and breeding, two things in which the Moors have always followed the footsteps of the Oriental Arabs, he managed to outpace the men of the Black Castle at last, and to reach the end of the valley far in advance of them all.

Once there, he felt comparatively safe, for he was at home among the rocks, mounted on foot, and his enemies did not care to pursue him there, for fear of the Almogavars.

Pepito did not ride far after reaching the mountains. Not only was his mare tired, but he himself was hungry and exhausted, for he had eaten nothing since the previous evening.

He dismounted and unsaddled the mare, turning her loose to crop the grass of a little valley wherein he had taken refuge, and then proceeded to investigate the saddle-bags of his mount.

He knew that the Moorish *kiaschefs*, being constantly on patrol, were wont to carry provisions with them, and much to his satisfaction found that his saddle was provided with a store of dry cakes of barley and some dates.

"Hermit's fare; but better than nothing," quoth Pepito to himself, as he finished the contents of the saddle-bag at one sitting.

His appetite was keen, and the needs of an abstemious Moor were very different from those of the lusty squire.

Once satisfied, he unstrapped from the saddle-bow the long white cloak of the defunct *kiaschef* whose place he had taken, and committed himself to slumber, careless of the future.

It was almost sunrise when he awoke, and found the mare feeding contentedly near him, for the creature was well used to watching over a sleeping master and knew the white *haik* familiarly.

She snorted a little and seemed surprised when he approached her to saddle up again, but made no resistance or attempt to flee, deceived by his Moorish dress; and Pepito was too wary to frighten her by any hurry or rough manners.

Shortly after, he rode out into the main val-

ley, and could see, far away in the distance, the gloomy towers of the Wizard's Castle.

There were no signs of his late pursuers however, and Pepito rode away toward the pass of the Almogavars, to try and find his master.

It was several hours' ride, and the squire was beginning to feel hungry again, when he reached the pass and saw below him the great plain of Toledo, with its canals and tanks glittering in the sun, surrounded by blooming gardens and fields.

Pepito naturally kept a sharp look-out for the Almogavar robbers. He knew that yesterday's punishment, while it might deter them from going into the plains, would render them all the keener among the rocks; and he was not wrong.

As he approached the mouth of the pass, where the road from Burgos to Toledo entered it, he distinguished moving figures among the rocks, and their actions convinced him that they were Almogavars, who had spied some one in the plain below coming toward the pass, and were arranging an ambush for the unwary traveler.

Full of anxiety as to how he would fare, for he well knew the relentless savagery of the Almogavars, Pepito rode slowly forward, first stringing his bow and bringing his quiver to the front.

He found that he had only four arrows left, and determined to make a dash for it, trusting to the speed of his mare for escape.

Accordingly, giving her a free rein, he shot down the pass to the high road at full speed, turned the corner of the mountain, which had hid part of the plain, and came in full view of the scene of yesterday's conflict.

There were the bodies of the slain, still unburied, and a number of wild figures were running down the mountain, while a pair of mounted men were ascending the pass from the plain below, entering the ambush quite unsuspectingly.

Pepito uttered a loud shout of warning as he galloped on, and saw that his cry was heeded, for the two travelers stopped.

Shouting louder than ever, for he could see that some of the Almogavars had already got behind them unseen, the squire dashed on.

But he was too late to save them entirely.

Just as he came within fifty yards, a dozen wild men, with their long spears, ran into the road close by, and the fight began.

Pepito gave a last shout—for he had recognized his master in one of the horsemen—and rushed into the fight, shooting his arrows at the Almogavars.

A wild, confused, running battle followed, the three men attacked making for the open country; and ten minutes later Pepito and his master were in the plain below, going at full speed for Toledo, their horses slightly wounded in a dozen places, but still uncrippled, while the third horseman, whoever he was, had disappeared, and the triumphant shouts of the Almogavars told too well his fate.

The last thing Pepito saw as he looked back was a kneeling figure that seemed to supplicate for mercy, while the Almogavars were dancing round it in savage glee.

Then he turned to his young master and cried aloud:

"Faith, master mine, we are always in luck, but it is fated that we shall turn Moslems in earnest. The way to Christendom is barred for good now."

CHAPTER X.

THE DOUBLES.

PEPITO'S master checked his horse, now that they were out of danger, and eyed Pepito in a manner expressive of some wonder.

"I thought they had thee, Pepito," he said. "I could have sworn I saw them spear the gray mule thou lovest so well; yet here thou art on a mare as good as mine, and unhurt. How didst thou do it?"

"Faith, your worship should know, since I lost my mule yesterday—worse luck—and your worship played the Moorish cavalier so well that the *kiaschef* gave me his horse."

The knight looked more surprised than before as he asked:

"And when did this happen?"

"Surely your worship knows that it was yesterday, after I met your worship, when we took the lady Panchita to the convent—"

Pepito spoke with some impatience, for he began to think his master was intentionally mystifying him; but before he could finish the knight interrupted him with a manner of intense eagerness:

"The Lady Panchita, sayst thou? Where is she, in the name of the Blessed Virgin?"

"In the convent of St. Ursula, to the best of my knowledge, senor," answered Pepito.

"How came she there?" pursued the knight, his tone becoming fierce in its eagerness.

"She went in at the gate, master mine, and left us out in the cold, like a pair of chickens looked out of the hen-house," answered Pepito, grinning at the recollection. "Twas a scurvy trick for a lady to play us, but there is no measuring a woman's whims."

His master looked at him in silence a moment, as if not knowing what to say, and then demanded, with lips that seemed to be compressed with a great effort to keep down rising passion: "Left whom outside? Who was with thee when ye stole this lady away from my care, Pepito?"

"Why, unless I have been asleep for two whole days, I should say 'twas your worship was with me last night, and the Lady Panchita grew so angry because you called yourself Ali Moudara, that she left us without so much as Good-night."

"Now, by heaven, Pepito Nunez, thou liest," cried the knight, white with passion.

"Last night we were wandering the plains of Toledo together, thou and I, hunting this wandering lady from hamlet to hamlet, till that old gray mule nearly dropped—"

"Not me, your worship," interrupted Pepito, for the first time in his life daring to cut in on his master's words. "By the chastity of the Blessed Virgin, I was in the mountains since yesterday noon, and I met the lady before I saw your worship."

They were walking their horses along toward Toledo, both men getting more excited every moment, when they were interrupted by the loud and discordant braying of a mule behind them.

Pepito turned in amazement, and beheld his long lost gray mule trotting after the horses, head and tail up, braying out its joy in the usual fashion of mules.

"Oh, Manchado, Manchado," cried the delighted squire, forgetting in a moment all the dispute as he caught sight of his old friend, "where have you been, and how did you get away from me in the night?"

His master suddenly clapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the mule.

"Dost thou mean that thou wast not on that mule an hour ago in my rear, coming up the pass?" he asked, fiercely.

"Nay, master mine, how could that be, when I was galloping down the pass on this mare, to warn you of the snare of the Almogavars?"

The knight struck his hand to his head in a fashion that denoted extreme bewilderment.

"Then I have been bewitched by the wise men of Toledo," he exclaimed, "and the Evil One himself must have taken thy shape to deceive me."

Pepito stared at his master in superstitious terror and faltered out:

"And has your worship been followed by a man in my likeness?"

"Yes, Pepito; I thought 'twas thee, though he pretended among the Moors that his name was Baba Moustafa."

Immediately Pepito slipped off his horse, fell on his knees by the roadside and began to pray fervently:

"Oh, St. Iago and St. Isidore, patrons of Castile, save us from the clutches of the Evil One. I will give three pounds of wax candles to each of your shrines, and walk barefoot to Compostella in the snow, so ye do not give me up to the Wicked Pursuer! Oh, Don Gonzalo, Master mine, we are undone, or at least I am. It must have been the Evil One in my shape, that comes to tell me I must die within a week. I am lost forever!"

Don Gonzalo, though the superstition of the age had infected him deeply, was not quite so much frightened as his squire.

"This man, Baba Moustafa, was no spirit of enchantment, Pepito," he said, gravely. "He was flesh and blood, and it is clear that the Almogavars have slain him, and let the mule go as worthless. See, the poor creature is covered with blood, where they have pricked it with their spears."

Pepito looked sadly at the mule, and then rose suddenly up, crying in a vindictive tone:

"I am glad of it. The thief deserves all the deaths a sinner can die, for daring to personate a good Christian."

Pepito felt very indignant, for it is a curious fact that people who for the first time find another resembling them strongly in person and feature, are apt to conceive an instinctive and violent repugnance to the same.

Don Gonzalo, on his part, began to cross-examine his squire.

"Thou sayest, thou sawest the lady Panchita yesterday, and took her to a convent. Where was this convent?"

Pepito became grave in a moment. "It was the convent of St. Ursula, under the walls of the Wizard's Castle, master mine," he answered.

"The Wizards Castle! Where is that?" asked Gonzalo, curiously.

"Surely I told your worship the story only last night," replied Pepito in a puzzled sort of way; and then started as a sudden thought struck him.

"Where was your worship last night?"

"Out in the plains of Toledo with this Baba Moustafa."

"Then your worship is bewitched too, for I swear that only last night the Lady Panchita entered that convent, leaving me outside with another cavalier, who was as like your worship as two peas."

Don Gonzalo turned pale and his eyes began to sparkle ominously.

"And this knight, thou sayest, was with the Lady Panchita?"

"Ay, your worship, and the lady seemed to be quite satisfied, for she called him her knight, and quarreled with him because he would not answer to the name of Don Gonzalo of Lara."

"And did he dare to assume my name, this heathen impostor?" asked Don Gonzalo, viciously, forgetting that the squire had just affirmed the contrary by implication.

"Faith, your worship, he seemed to be ready to take any name the lady wished, and behaved as much like a foolish lover as a knight could be expected to do."

"Then by the Light of Heaven I will seek out this impostor and chastise him," cried Gonzalo furiously. "He has enticed away Panchita, and embroiled me with the sweetest lady in the world, and he dies for it. Follow me."

"But, your worship is not going to try and pass the Almogavars again," cried Pepito aghast, as Don Gonzalo turned back to the pass.

"See if I do not," was the obstinate reply.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KIASCHEFS.

PEPITO NUNEZ was, as we know, a brave man, but he had a fund of strong common sense which prevented him from indulging in the extravagant vagaries of chivalry. He saw that his master was madly set on returning through the Pass of the Almogavars, to revenge himself on his double, and he knew that the attempt could only end in his death.

Riding up beside him therefore, the stout squire began to plead earnestly with the knight.

"Don Gonzalo, master mine," he began, "consider, sir knight, that in you lies the only hope of the house of Lara. The count your father has sent you forth to gain experience as a warrior, and will you throw your life away like a madman? See the Almogavars! There are at least fifty of them there, and we can never get through alive."

"I will tell the Almogavars my mission, and they will let me pass," replied Gonzalo obstinately, still walking his horse forward.

"They will not listen," retorted Pepito earnestly. "See how— Hark! what is that?"

Behind them, on the road, they heard the clatter and clash of a body of cavalry coming at a gallop, and Gonzalo cried out triumphantly:

"It is the kiaschefs under Meer Haroun Abd Allah. He knows me only as Sheer Ali Moudara al Gebel, and will help me. We will use the Moslems to beat the Almogavars, Pepito, and thou and I will escape while these Infidels fight our battles for us. Is not that a good plan?"

Pepito smiled more complacently, for the idea suited his common sense.

"That will be splendid, if we can do it, master mine; but perhaps they will not run into danger. They know these Almogavars are bad fellows among their rocks."

In fact, the savage robbers of the pass did not seem to be much alarmed at the approach of the cloud of dust which revealed the kiaschefs on their daily patrol. The Almogavars could be seen forming a line across the road which was the only means of ascending the pass, and their numbers were sufficient to occupy it from side to side.

Don Gonzalo and Pepito halted to await the Moorish column, which numbered several hundred men; and very soon, as the knight had predicted, Meer Haroun Abd Allah, the white-learded chief, came cantering up and halted beside them, while his men, at a silent signal, made a complete circle round knight and squire.

"Welcome, Meer Haroun," cried Don Gonzalo, joyfully. "You are just in time to clear out those Almogavars for us. They attacked us but a few moments ago. You know me, I suppose."

The old Moor looked at him gravely and replied in a hesitating way:

"I have seen your lordship before, but am not certain. What is your honorable name?"

"I am Sheer Ali Moudara al Gebel, the Lion of the Rock," said the knight, boldly.

"And my lord can doubtless repeat the *Fatiha*" (confession of faith), rejoined Meer Haroun.

Gonzalo looked at him curiously.

"What meanest thou, man?"

They had been using the current *lingua Moresca*, common to Moors and Spaniards in those days, and this was the only reason that the knight had escaped detection so long among the Moslems.

Now Meer Haroun changed his language and said slowly:

"*Bismilla hi Rahmani raheem. Hi Rahmani, hi maliki, you mudeen.*"*

* The first words of the Koran, which are committed to memory by all Moslems. They mean: "In the name of (God, Most Merciful of the Merciful! Most Merciful, Most Good of all Beings)" etc.

Gonzalo looked puzzled, and as for Pepito, his quick wits told him that all was found out.

Meer Haroun smiled grimly at their confusion, and then spoke to Gonzalo.

"My lord, whoever you are, you are my prisoner, by order of the great Vizier, Al Mansour, whom may Allah protect."

For one moment Gonzalo thought of resistance, and looked fiercely round him; but twenty spear-points were already presented at him, and even his wild spirit saw that the contest was useless.

With a haughty sneer he threw down his lance in the road.

"I am your prisoner," he said, "but ye can never deny that a Christian knight, single-handed, slew your best men and traversed the streets of Toledo alone. Take me to your Vizier. I can die for the faith."

The old Moor smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not a question of dying for any religion, sir knight," he said, dryly, "but of spying out a strange land under the disguise of another, and he the adopted son of the great Al Mansour. When the true Lion of the Rock comes back from Africa he will be able to show whether he deserves the title."

Gonzalo flushed slightly under the old man's taunts, but he maintained his hardihood.

"Lead on to Cordova, Meer Haroun, and spare me thy sermons," he retorted, impatiently. "I am somewhat of a fighter myself, as your Aben Amar found out, and I may show your Lion of the Rock that I laugh at his claws and teeth in a fair field."

"My son," replied the old Moor, with his usual imperturbable gravity, "it is written: 'Young men, despise not the counsels of white hairs.' In another place the wise man saith: 'The boaster before a fight is not always the victor.' Give up thy sword and mace, and let us be on our way, for we must ride hard for Cordova."

With the same sullen dignity he had shown before, Gonzalo submitted to be disarmed, while Pepito, with a humorous resignation that did him honor, handed over his weapons to one of the *kiaschefs* saying:

"It serves us both right, my masters. I deserve it for leaving my Manchado and taking to horseflesh. May I once more change to my old friend?"

No objection was made to the transfer, and the squire was soon mounted on his sober gray mule, which brayed out its satisfaction in ludicrous tones of joy.

Then the whole party turned their backs on the pass of the Almogavars, followed by a taunting yell of triumph from the hill robbers, who imagined they had frightened away the Moors.

Meer Haroun heard the yell and gave some orders to his men, of whom a large detachment at once separated themselves from the main body and galloped toward the pass. The last thing Don Gonzalo saw of them, ere they were hidden from sight by the corner of the wood, the Moors were hovering in front of the hill men, shooting their arrows and evading a closer attack.

Then the wood interrupted the view, and the train started at a rapid amble toward Toledo.

The prisoner, who was left quite free as to his limbs, though unarmed, rode near the old chief, buried in gloomy thoughts. At last he roused himself from his sullen discontent to inquire:

"How came you to know I was not Ali Moudara, and how came the order for my arrest?"

Meer Haroun smiled slightly.

"The captive asks, and the jailer keeps his own counsel, whether to answer or not. The wise man says: 'Trust not in woman, and lean not on a reed. Both will fail thee in the hour of need.'"

"You mean I was betrayed by a woman?" asked Gonzalo quickly.

Again the old Moor smiled in his ambiguous and provoking manner.

"The potter's son looked on the Caliph's daughter and loved her, but the princess ordered that he be given the stick for kissing a slave in the dark. The wise man saith: 'Women are like sheep; they need a shepherd.'"

And this was all the satisfaction Gonzalo could get from him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STAR OF CORDOVA.

THE level rays of the setting sun reflected in scarlet and gold from the clouds that gathered round his couch, shone on the domes and minarets of the fair city of Cordova, the home of the Spanish Caliphs. Embowered in gardens of roses and jasmine, where the fountains sparkled merrily among the orange and lemon groves, while a white girdle of cottonfields surrounded the whole city and suburbs, a fairer home for mortal man was never devised.

In the midst of the city towered "Al Jama," the world renowned Mosque of Cordova; with its thousand and ninety-three marble columns; its nineteen grand doorways and aisles, pointing toward Mecca; its forty-six hundred silver

lamps; its walls of marble, incrusting with Arabic inscriptions, flashing in crystal letters.

Even to-day, ruined and reduced to five aisles, its lamps stolen by Christian raiders, the Mosque is a monument of beauty. In those times it was the wonder of the world.

All around Cordova the country was like one vast garden, for the Moors were the best agriculturists of the globe. The waters of the Guadalquivir, which to day roll through a dry plain were then arrested, conducted into a maze of canals and tanks, and made to irrigate the fertile soil for miles around. Under the Moslem rule, Spain was a garden; while the Christians have turned much of that garden into a desert in our day.

But more beautiful than even Cordova, with its white walls half buried in roses and vines, was the palace of Medina-al-Zohra, the "City of the Flower," where the luxurious Caliph Haschem passed his idle days away among the blossoms and rills. All that Arabian fancy and Greek art could muster of beauty and riches were lavished on the "City of the Flower." A veritable cluster of palaces it was; a labyrinth of marble-paved courts, variegated with flower-beds and fountains; pavilions of colored marbles and costly green malachite; columns and statues, regardless of the Prophet's command against images.

The renowned Al Hambra, which we see to-day, with all its beauties, was as nothing compared to the wonders of Al Zohra; while the palaces of Bagdad in the palmiest days of Haroun Al Raschid would have appeared mean and sordid beside its gardens and courts.

In the very center of all this beauty, in the Harem Court, with its leaping fountain of quicksilver, lay the princess Zoraya, reclining on her cushions of gold brocade, and listening to the eager chatter of a small negro slave with an impish face, full of fun and malice, who was pouring out to his mistress a budget of news.

Zoraya, surrounded by luxury and beauty, looked listless and unhappy. Before her was the famous "Swan Fountain" a costly toy unequalled in the world before or since, but the Caliph's daughter looked discontentedly at it and curled her lip as if in scorn.

Yet it was a marvel in itself. A large swan of pure gold, set with jewels, held in its beak a shell of gold, set with a single pearl, the largest in the world, a present to the Caliph from the Emperor of Constantinople.

From the edges of this shell spouted glittering streams of quicksilver, falling with a metallic tinkle into the jasper basin below, each jet a miniature mirror, in which every feature of the beauty round them was reflected.

Such a fountain was unique in the history of luxury; but to Zoraya it was an old story and she was weary of it. The boy's chatter hardly interested her, though she had sent him to Cordova herself to collect the news for her. The honeyed monotony of the harem was a weariness to her, and she was idly wishing that she had been born a man, when the boy suddenly attracted her notice by saying:

"Yes, my princess; and they say that Al Mansour will have the Christian beheaded to-morrow, for daring to take the name of his adopted son Ali Moudara, the Lion of the Rock."

"What art thou talking of, Zadok?" pettishly asked Zoraya. "What Christian?"

"I don't know, my lady; but the people say in the streets that Meer Haroun Abd Allah brought in a prisoner to-day, a Christian knight, with his squire, who had come to Toledo and passed themselves off for Sheer Ali Moudara and his slave, Baba Moustafa."

"Well, and did they bring no one else in?" asked the princess, concealing her agitation at the news.

"No one else, my lady."

"Was there not a Christian woman, one Panchita, with them?" asked the lady, in an indifferent tone.

"No, my lady."

"Very good, Zadok. Art sure that Al Mansour hath these Christians in prison?"

"Yes, my lady, for I asked the captain of Al Mansour's guard, and he told me that they were to be beheaded by sunset to-morrow."

"That will do, Zadok. Tell Mousa I want to see him."

Zadok salaamed low and left the court, when the princess lost all the control over her features which had enabled her to dissemble before the cunning and observant slave.

"He is to be slain, and I am the cause of his death," she murmured, with a pale, frightened face. "What shall I do to save him I love?"

Quick and impetuous in all things, the Morisco princess had rushed headlong into love as heedlessly as she had into a hundred other scrapes; and now, for the first time in her life, found herself confronted by an obstacle that even her powers, as the Caliph's daughter, could not surmount.

Hitherto she had been accustomed to find everything bend to her will, but she knew the Vizier Al Mansour was not made of the same stuff as the rest of the Moors.

Never wanting in outward respect to the nominal ruler of the realm, her father, the in-

dolent Caliph Haschem, the stern Vizier was in reality absolute ruler of all in Spain.

His fame, established on his numerous victories, made him an object of wonder, fear and almost adoration to the people. He was wise and temperate, plain in dress and habits, lived in a modest house, while his nominal master lolled on brocaded cushions in a marble palace; but none the less Haschem feared Al Mansour, "The Invincible," and would no more have dared to oppose his counsels than to have mounted a war-horse and charged with his soldiers beside the mighty Vizier.

Zoraya knew this, and knew that she could not count on her father's aid to save her lover, if Al Mansour decreed his death. If anything were to do, she must do it herself, and work on the Vizier's pity, for his justice was fearless of offending any Moor in Spain.

While she was thinking what to do, Mousa, the chief of the Harem Guards, entered the court and salaamed profoundly before his young mistress; for Zoraya possessed more influence in the palace than all her father's favorites put together could muster, and Mousa knew it.

"Mousa," began the little beauty in her imperious fashion, "I must go to Cordova to-night."

Mousa bowed low, but hesitated.

"It will be difficult, princess. The palace will be shut up in an hour from now—"

"I do not want to go to the palace," she retorted. "This palace is better than the old castle at Cordova. I want to leave here secretly, with only thee to guard me from harm."

Mousa smiled dubiously.

"The ladies would catch wind of it, unless we went in the dark—"

"We will go in the dark."

"And your highness must adopt some disguise—"

"I will go as a boy."

"Your highness will be a very little boy."

Zoraya stamped her foot.

"No remarks. You shall be a merchant of figs. I am your son; a child. Will you do it, or not?"

As she spoke she took off all the rings from both hands and held them out. Mousa shut his eyes, turned his back, but put both hands open behind him.

There was a little clinking sound, and Mousa remarked, as if going on with a conversation:

"As your highness says, in one hour, at the Western Gate, she will be there."

Zoraya smiled graciously on him.

"Thou art right. She will be there. Send Zadok to my chamber with the dress."

The sun had already sunk behind the clouds in the west, and the short Spanish twilight was fast changing to night. The moon was several days past the full, and Zoraya knew that the night would be a dark one as she hurried to her chamber.

On her way there she passed more than one of the harem slaves and favorites, to whom she announced that she did not wish to be disturbed that evening, as she was ill.

Gaining her chamber, she locked the door, and was soon saluted by Zadok's gentle tap.

This little imp of mischief could be discreet, as she knew; and his face was discharged of all expression as he threw into the room a little bundle of clothes without saying a word, then turned and ran away.

Zoraya, like most women of the harem, was used to intrigue, and under the lax rule of the indolent Caliph, had had every opportunity therefor. This was not the first time she had been to Cordova in disguise in the night; and Mousa, the strong and savage-looking negro, had always been near her to protect her from any evil consequences of her escapades. Her expedition after the Maiden Tribute had been the first occasion where she had accepted the guardianship of another, and that had been made under the sanction of Al Mansour himself.

"And he must have heard from some spy of Toledo, how we came there with no guards," thought Zoraya as she rapidly disguised herself; "and he has divined the rest. Oh, the sharp eyes of Al Mansour! But we will see if a woman cannot outwit him at last."

An hour later, when dark night brooded over the palace of Al Zohra, when the mists were curling up from the plains around Cordova, two people rode slowly out of the palace-gate and took their way to the city.

The gaunt big-boned frame of Mousa was draped in long dark robes, with a voluminous white turban above, and his razor-like scimitar was concealed under a brown burnoose. He rode on a black mule and was followed by a little boy in the ordinary habit of a slave, who bestrode the tiniest of Egyptian donkeys.

This little boy was as black as ebony, with the usual bullet-head and frizzled wool of the negro, and no one would have suspected that under that disguise was hidden the renowned Star of Cordova, the Caliph's daughter, for whose hand the King of Morocco had pleaded in vain. So much can be done when wigs and dye are skillfully used.

The older intriguer was delighted with his

pupil. Born a slave and set over other slaves, trained to nothing but watching a number of caged women, to see that no male creature came near them, old Mousa had but one weakness, of which the Harem took advantage. He was a miser, as a crow is a miser, heaping up bright gold and jewels in a secret hiding place, from an innate love of hoarding. Zoraya had played on this weakness again and again, till Mousa had begun to consider her a sort of gold mine, only to be worked with peril, but well worth it.

"What is my name, Mousa?" asked the disguised girl, pertly, as she rode up beside him in the dark; "and who art thou?"

Old Mousa cackled gleefully.

"I am Mousa, the chief of the guards, and thou art Zadok, a mischievous little wretch that is a pest to the whole palace; therefore the Princess Zoraya hath commanded me to sell thee in Cordova for what I can get, and I am going to offer thee to Al Mansour himself."

Zoraya clapped her hands and laughed aloud at the plan.

"Good! good! And I will be so pert and play so many tricks that he'll send me to prison at once, and I shall see him."

Mousa sobered down at once.

"See whom? Not a man! Impossible, my princess."

"Everything is possible to ten purses, Mousa, and I am only Zadok," was the quick reply. "I must get access to the prison, where lies a Christian knight who is to be slain to-morrow, and thou must get me in there."

Mousa reflected.

"Ten purses! A thousand dinars of gold! Your highness cannot get them so readily."

"I can get ten, twenty, fifty, if I tell my father I want some new rings, Mousa. Come, thou wilt do it."

"It is true that I know the keeper of the prison very well," said Mousa, musingly, "and it is just possible that he might take the boy Zadok for a trial to serve the prisoners."

Zoraya whipped up her donkey to a smart trot, saying in her saucy way:

"Come along, old tortoise, I must be in the prison before the water-bell sounds, or thou losest thy purses."

Mousa made no more objections, for a bargain was always to him a bargain, and the strangely assorted pair pressed on at a rapid pace, reaching the great gates of Cordova in a short time.

Unlike those of Toledo, which city was near the Christian border, these gates were not closed at sunset, but were left open every night till the sounding of the "water-bell."

This was the signal, given about three hours after sunset, for the watchmen at the tanks on the plain to open the sluices and let out the water to irrigate the fields, a signal repeated every half hour, as the gates are opened or closed. The custom is kept up to-day in Granada.

Old Mousa rode past the guard-house at the gate, where he was hailed by the officer on duty:

"Whither goest thou, and who art thou?"

Mousa turned his face to the other, and screamed out in his shrill tones:

"Mind thine own affairs. I am the Chief of the Harem Guards, Mousa Abd-ul-Keim, on my way to the prison to see the keeper."

"Well, then, peace be with thee, and don't come back after the water-bell sounds, or I'll not open," answered the Moor, sharply, for he hated Mousa as belonging to a rival establishment.

"I'll come back when I please, and bring my friends with me," replied Mousa, sneeringly. "I'd have thee know that the Commander of the Faithful does not ask leave to send his slaves in and out of his own gates, Akil ben Zab."

The Moor addressed growled out a few curses; but Mousa rode away without heeding him, and soon came to the doors of the great gloomy pile where the Vizier Al Mansour kept his prisoners of state and war.

As Mousa had said, he was an old friend of the keeper of the prison, a negro like himself, once a slave, and put in his present place by Al Mansour because of his fierce fidelity.

His name was Bou Sheer "Son of the Lion," and he looked like a lion, with his broad hanging jaw, his little red eyes, and shaggy mane that surrounded his fierce visage.

But all his fierceness disappeared in grim jocularly as soon as he saw his old crony Mousa, whom he pulled into the prison at once crying:

"Is it thou, old war-horse? I have been wanting to see thee all day."

Mousa went in with him followed by Zoraya, who kept up her character of a little boy-slave very well; and Bou Sheer introduced them to his own room, where he had been enjoying himself over a secret flask of wine.

"Oh, Mousa," cried the jailer, a huge negro of muscular frame, "I wish thou wert to stay till the morrow. I have two executions, old wolf of the mountains, both Christians, and I will show thee that I have not forgotten my old trade. I'll take each head off at a stroke and drop it in a basket, or be called a bungler."

Zoraya, who was crouched in a corner, slave fashion, shuddered as she heard him, for she

realized who were the victims; but Mousa only cackled, as might a connoisseur in art.

"That is nothing," he said. "I have seen the day when I have severed the head of a standing man so cleanly that he remained there with his neck cut through and not a drop of blood fell for a minute or more."

Bou Sheer grinned incredulously.

"Bah! who will believe that? Where was the head?"

"On his shoulders, and none could tell it was cut off till the man fell and the head rolled away."

Again Bou Sheer grinned.

"Thou hast not forgotten how to lie, old fox of Soudan. I'll do my best to-morrow, but I cannot promise to do like that. Who is this boy thou hast with thee?"

"A little imp of Eblis whom the princess wants me to sell to thee, Bou Sheer. He is always playing tricks on the slaves in the harem, but he is quick enough if you give him the stick twice a day."

Bou Sheer looked contemptuously at the black boy, for he was a keen bargainer.

"He is not big enough to be any good," he observed. "He might carry round the food to the prisoners, but that's all. What is he worth?"

"I will sell him for fifty dinars," replied Mousa, always anxious to turn an honest penny; but Bou Sheer laughed in scorn.

"Fifty dogs' tails! I'll give thee ten and put him to work at once."

"As an old friend, I will not be covetous," observed Mousa, with his most insinuating grin. "You shall have him for twenty-five."

"Nay, I would not be hard on old Mousa, who taught me how to cut heads off like poppies. I'll give fifteen."

"Say twenty and Zadok is thine."

"Fifteen, by the Prophet's head! Not another piece of copper."

"Twenty, or he goes back."

"Well then, take sixteen dinars."

"I will not sell him under nineteen."

"I'll give thee seventeen."

"The boy's thine. Give me the money."

Bou Sheer dived into the bag at his girdle, where he kept the money of the criminals he beheaded—the perquisite of the executioner from old times—and slowly counted out seventeen pieces of gold, dull and dingy, battered and clipped, but none the less lawful money of the realm.

Then the executioner called to the disguised princess:

"Come here, imp of Eblis! What's thy name?"

"Zadok," answered the little one, jumping actively up and beginning to dance and hum, in the usual manner of negro children, void of care and foresight.

"Well, Zadok," said Bou Sheer, in his harsh, cracked voice, "thou seest this whip?"

He held up a formidable whip of buffalo hide, an inch thick at the butt, and grinned maliciously.

"Any of thy tricks on me, and thou catchest a taste of this."

"I hear, my master," answered the seeming boy, submissively, and ceasing all his antics.

"Good. I'll set thee to work at once. Take that basket and jug of water to the Christian prisoners at the end of the corridor. Put them in through the wicket, and then come back here."

"Yes, my master," answered Zadok, in a trembling voice, as if overcome with terror, and Bou Sheer smiled grimly as the child left the room with the articles indicated.

"I allow no tricks in my place," he observed to Mousa. "In a month I will have him trained and sell him back to the princess for a hundred dinars. Now let us be merry, old jackal, for I've not seen thee for a century, it seems."

As he spoke he drew out the big flask of fiery sherry, and Mousa's eyes glistened with eagerness as he reached out his hand and grasped the welcome vessel. The two worthies were old toppers, despite the Koran, and everything was propitious for a deep carouse.

In the mean time Zoraya stole along the dark corridor to where a light gleamed through the wicket of a door.

CHAPTER XIII.

AL MANSOUR.

THE great Vizier had closed the day's public business and was about to retire to his own house, when one of the guards informed him that Bou Sheer, the executioner, was waiting without to see him.

Al Mansour nodded his head.

"Let him enter. He comes to tell us of the death of the two spies."

The Vizier was an old man with a keen Arab face and long gray beard. Like the great Richelieu, a few centuries later, he was a man of pitiless will, who had brought order out of chaos, and never slackened the reins while there was any restiveness in his team. Like Richelieu he could be kind and even generous on occasion, but only when his foes were at his mercy.

He looked keenly at the gigantic negro as

Bou Sheer entered the room, prostrating himself face down on the floor and waiting for the command to rise. Something in the man's appearance seemed to displease the Vizier, for he frowned.

"Where are the heads, Bou Sheer?" he demanded, sternly. "Did I not bid thee bring them? Rise and answer."

The executioner rose as he was bidden and remained standing before the Vizier in an attitude of dejection, trembling in every fiber of his huge body, till Al Mansour again asked:

"Where are the heads of the spies?"

Then Bou Sheer bowed his own head before his chief, and answered in a husky whisper:

"Let my lord kill me. The men have escaped by witchcraft."

In a moment the Vizier, a slender, wiry man, who looked like a dwarf beside the negro giant, had sprung from the divan on which he sat, and clutched the other's shoulder, hissing out:

"Dog, thou dardest not say it!"

The great negro sunk on his knees beneath the clutch of that slender brown hand, as if struck by lightning.

"Mercy, my lord, mercy! It is true," was all he could gasp.

For a moment a fearful change passed over Al Mansour's fine face, rendering it perfectly satanic in its fury. The Vizier started back to the divan, flashed out the scimitar that had been lying sheathed beside him, and ran at Bou Sheer, uttering a snarl like a wild beast.

The executioner shuddered all through his brawny muscles, but bent forward his head submissively, as if offering it to the blow, and Al Mansour paused, glaring and panting, as if he were about to strike.

In another moment the great Vizier had recovered his self command enough to lower his arm, but it was in a voice trembling with passion that he said:

"Dog of Africa, tell me how this came about. Mind thou liest not."

Bou Sheer looked timidly up. His black face had turned gray with fear, but he obeyed in the dull, submissive way of one born a slave.

The Vizier still stood before him, sword in hand, but he had rested the point on the floor, and his face was composed into its usual stern gravity. Al Mansour was too good a judge of human nature to drive the wits out of a man from whom he wished to draw the truth.

Bou Sheer, without waiting to be further questioned, huskily told his tale.

"Mousa, the chief eunuch of the harem guards, came to see me last night and sold me a slave called Zadok, by order of the Princess Zoraya."

Al Mansour lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"And this slave let them go. Is that it?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And where is he?"

"Gone with them, my lord."

Al Mansour turned away his head as if musing, and a thoughtful look came over his face. Returning to the divan, he slowly sheathed the scimitar, and then asked in an absent sort of way:

"Where is Mousa?"

"Gone back to Al Zohra, my lord."

Al Mansour mused again; all the anger gone out of his face.

"When did you find it out?" he asked.

"Just now, my lord, when I went to their cells to kill them. I missed the boy first."

"What boy?"

"The slave Zadok, that Mousa sold me, my lord, for thirty dinars."

"Oh, he was a boy, then?"

"A mere child, my lord. I thought he would do to carry food to the prisoners, and I sent him to do it, as soon as I had paid for him."

"Last night?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And how comes it you only found out the escape this morning? What were you doing all night?"

Bou Sheer hung his head lower than ever as he whispered:

"I was asleep, my lord."

The Vizier looked at him keenly.

"Drunk, you mean. Where was Mousa?"

"With me, my lord. He slept first."

A faint sneer curled the Vizier's gray mustache.

"A pretty pair! And in the morning where was Mousa?"

"Gone, my lord."

Again Al Mansour fell into a fit of deep thought, from which he roused himself to inquire:

"When did you wake up? Tell me the story as straight as you can."

"I woke when the second call for prayer was being chanted, and it was some time before I was clear in my head. I called for Zadok and he did not answer. I looked for him and he had gone. I supposed he was in the street, so I took my whip to hunt for him. I could not find him in the street, though I searched till the third call for prayer. Then I became frightened and went home, where I found the men gone."

Al Mansour listened attentively, but made no observation till Bou Sheer had finished.

Then he clapped his hands to summon his guards and spoke to the officer in charge with his usual rapid decision.

"A Christian knight and squire, with a black slave boy named Zadok, have escaped from the prison. Send out the alarm on all the roads to Castile, and have them brought to me. The man pretends to be Ali Moudara, they tell me, though I have not seen him. Send Abou Nabel here."

The officer retired and Al Mansour remained in thought, not noticing the kneeling executioner by look or word, till a wizened old black entered the room and bowed himself before the minister. This was Abou Nabel, chief of Al Mansour's harem.

The Vizier spoke to him also in the abrupt, imperious tones of a man used to command.

"Go to Medina Al Zohra at once, and see if there is a boy-slave called Zadok there, or if he has been sold. See the Princess Zoraya, and ask her if she authorized his sale. Bring back the news quickly to my house."

Abou Nabel prostrated himself a second time and left the room, when Al Mansour addressed the trembling executioner harshly.

"Thou art a fool and the son of a fool. Go back to the prison and wait my orders. Thank the stars under which thou wast born that Al Mansour is thy master. Go."

Without a word Bou Sheer went shambling out of the room, and Al Mansour smiled grimly after him as he muttered:

"It was my fault as much as his. In all this I see a hand I know, or I am a fool as well as thou."

The Vizier did not seem to be very much disturbed in mind as he left the audience-room, a little while after, and walked through the streets to his modest house, within a stone's throw of the palace.

Al Mansour was too fond of the real substance of power to care for its outward show, and indeed rather affected an ostentation of simplicity in all his dealings with the world, rarely using a horse or litter save on campaigns, and having no guards save at the palace, when he transacted public business.

But his house, though modest outside, was ample and luxurious within, and the Vizier lacked no comfort that his simple tastes required.

He unlocked the low, mean-looking door, opening in a blank wall, that admitted him into the court of his own house, and found himself in the midst of Oriental luxury at once; surrounded by obsequious slaves ready to wait on him, who conducted him to the harem, where he was wont to repose after the fatigues of the day.

Al Mansour, unlike most Moors, was the husband of one wife, the partner of his youth, once a Christian captive, now known as Sitt Zeinab, or Lady Zeinab.

She was a fine, dignified woman of middle age, with a strong sensible face, and was Al Mansour's chosen confidante in many an emergency requiring wise counsels.

The great Vizier looked thoughtful as he seated himself on the divan by his wife, and the lady gave a secret signal to her slaves, which emptied the room of all listeners in a trice.

Then she said:

"What ails my lord? Are the men of the North threatening war again?"

"The men of the North are quiet since I harried Compostella," was the answer with a slight smile. "It is not that, Zeinab."

"Then what is it, my lord?"

"A new frolic of the Shooting Star."

Zeinab laughed, for it was their custom to call Zoraya (The Star) "Shooting Star," on account of her erratic ways.

"Why, what has the wild princess done now? Has she shown her face unveiled at noonday to all the people, or spent a hundred purses to buy a new monkey?"

The Vizier smiled slightly and then looked grave again.

"Neither, Zeinab, but I think she has been meddling with state affairs."

"Indeed, my lord? Is the Commander of the Faithful awake at last, and has she incited him to take the head of the state once more?"

Al Mansour made a sort of grimace, expressive of supreme contempt, as he answered:

"Al Haschem is all I could wish. I will but take a journey to Africa and leave him to himself, if he ever wax restive. Before I reach the coast he will send for me to come back. No, it is not that."

"Then what is it, my lord?"

"Thou knowest the boy Ali Moudara that we adopted?"

"Ay, my lord," and Zeinab's face lighted up with affectionate remembrance.

"Well, one has come into these parts who is said to resemble him strongly, and who has imposed on our people, calling himself Ali Moudara."

"But our boy is in Africa," interposed Zeinab, eagerly. "The people all knew it too well to be deceived."

"Nevertheless, they have been deceived. It seems that this impostor is a Christian, and that he has enticed Baba Moustafa to follow him."

"Baba Moustafa! Why, he was in Cordova only three days ago."

"It seems, however, that he hath fled thence, for he is nowhere to be found, and this stranger hath a man with him who is called Baba Moustafa, and answers to the same description."

"But what has all this to do with the Shooting Star?"

"Simply that this stranger came to Toledo with the Maiden Tribute, and Soudani, the head slave, tells a story which shows that she got up the trick herself."

"I warned you it was not prudent to let that madcap girl go to Castile without a prudent governor," observed Zeinab, triumphantly; but the Vizier only laughed.

"I know thou didst, but I had my reasons. I would not be sorry to have some Christian prince or noble of high degree see Zoraya and go mad for love, as they say those Christians are wont to do. But these things never come as we wish them. This fellow, it seems, is some needy knight of Castile, too poor to give his squire a horse—so Soudani says—and yet bears this strange likeness to Ali Moudara."

"And you think Zoraya has fallen in love with him?"

"I'm sure, Zeinab. Soudani is an excellent spy, and reports well. She loved him enough to be jealous and send him off in a lover's quarrel."

"Send him off? Then he is gone."

"Not far. Lovers never do. He was hovering round Toledo when I heard of it, and signaled the kiaschefs to take him and bring him here. I feared it might be our Ali himself in some mad freak, secretly come back, but as soon as they told me he could not recite the *Fatiha*, I ordered his head and that of his squire to be taken off."

"And what said the Shooting Star to that?"

"Nothing. But she has done something. She sent a little impish slave-boy, called Zadok, to the prison with old Mousa, and they made the executioner drunk and released the prisoners."

Zeinab uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"What! Did she dare?"

Al Mansour smiled.

"She is very daring. I shall soon know more about it, however, for here comes Abou Nabel, whom I sent to the palace for news."

The old negro here entered the room and prostrated himself before his master; after which he made his report in a few words.

"The boy Zadok is in the room without, my lord. The Princess Zoraya and Mousa have gone from the palace, no one knows whither."

Even the trained composure of the Vizier gave way in a violent start at the news, and then he said sharply:

"Send the boy in quickly."

In a few moments Zadok, his comical black face looking as stupid as that of an owl, his eyes rolling all sorts of ways, stood before the mighty Al Mansour.

The keen-witted Vizier, who ruled over so many millions of Moslems, saw in a moment that the boy was bracing himself up to lie out of some scrape, and he made a sign to Abou Nabel. The old negro bowed acquiescence and pulled from his girdle a long whip of buffalo hide, still familiar in Oriental justice under the name of a *koorbatoh*.

Al Mansour beckoned Zadok forward, and questioned him.

"Where didst thou sleep last night?"

"In the palace, my lord."

"When didst thou leave the prison?"

"I never was there, my lord."

"Where is the princess?"

"I do not know, my lord."

"Where is Mousa?"

"I do not know, my lord."

Al Mansour smiled slightly and made a sign to Abou Nabel, who at once seized the boy and began to flog him unmercifully. Zadok was a fat, pampered, petted boy, who had never suffered before; and, as the Vizier had foreseen, instantly broke down under the torture, howling out:

"I'll tell all I know, my lord. I will indeed. Mercy! mercy!"

Al Mansour made a sign, and the old negro released Zadok and set him on his feet before the Vizier, who said in his stern, impassive way:

"Tell all thou knowest quickly, and a cut comes down for the first lie."

Zadok sniffled and sobbed a moment, and then told all he knew, which was but little. Mousa had given him a slave's dress, and told him to take it to the rooms of the princess. He had seen Mousa leave the palace after dark, with a little black slave that he believed to be the princess disguised, and neither had come back since.

That was all he knew, even after a second flogging, wherefore Al Mansour sent him home in disgust.

Then the Vizier turned to his wife with a grave face, saying:

"Thou seest it is a serious affair. The little fool has compromised herself, whoever this

Christian may be. She has fled with him and they have gone to Castile."

Ere his wife could answer, a slave entered the room and presented the Vizier a letter from the chief of the kiaschefs, which read:

"We have taken them."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRISONERS.

WHEN Al Mansour heard that the prisoners were retaken, he was as much elated as he had been depressed before.

"Where is Yakoub Hamet?" he asked eagerly of the slave who had brought the letter.

"The captain waits below with the prisoners," answered the slave.

"Send them up here at once. Zeinab, veil thyself," said the Vizier sharply.

In a few moments more, Yakoub Hamet, captain of the kiaschefs, came into the room, followed by about a dozen men, who led in their midst two prisoners heavily ironed, their faces covered with black caps.

Al Mansour smiled humorously.

"Why, captain, what makes thee so timid to-day?" he asked. "Dost thou fear these men will get loose, and slay all thy guard?"

"Noble Al Mansour, they are both desperate. We took them all unawares, and even then they slew five men ere they were overpowered. The tall one swears he is the Lion of the Rocks and the short one curses the Prophet like a mad Christian."

"Let them loose now," said the Vizier, composedly. "They will not hurt me. Take off those caps. I would see if either of these men is like Ali Moudara, or if it be a fable indeed."

The captain hesitated.

"I warn my lord they are dangerous."

"Do as I bid thee, Yakoub Hamet."

Then the officer obeyed in silence, slowly removing the stifling caps, in the shape of extinguishers, from the heads of the prisoners, and revealing to view the features of a handsome golden-haired youth and a black-bearded man in the prime of life.

Al Mansour started violently as soon as he saw them, and ejaculated in a low voice to his wife, who still sat beside him:

"Just Allah! it is his very phantom! Every line is the same; and this must be witchcraft."

As to the prisoners, no sooner were their eyes at liberty than both stared about them in amazement. The black-browed man looked all round the beautifully decorated room as if he were taking an inventory, but the youth never took his eyes off the Vizier's face.

"Take off their irons, Yakoub," said Al Mansour as quietly as before. "They will do no harm to me."

The captain of the kiaschefs obeyed in silence, and the prisoners were beckoned forward to the front of the divan. Here they stood, the youth in sullen silence, with folded arms, eying the Vizier's face with a gaze as keen as his own.

"Who are ye and why come ye hither?" asked Al Mansour, sternly.

The young man made no answer, but the elder at once replied with a counter question:

"Does your worship mean me?"

"I know thee well enough. Thou art Baba Moustafa, the son of the Christian doctor that ran away from Cordova thirty years ago. Thou hast followed thy father now, by running away to new masters. Is't not so, Baba Moustafa?"

The black-bearded man grinned and bowed as he answered:

"Far be it from me to contradict your worship. I am anything your worship pleases."

Al Mansour gave a satisfied sort of "humph!" and turned to the young man, asking him:

"And what is thy name?"

The youth looked him full in the face without shrinking:

"You know well enough. I am not one to deny it at any cost, even if I lose my lady thereby. I am Ali Moudara, your adopted son."

For a moment the Vizier seemed to be puzzled. He looked fixedly at the young man, then at the old one, and finally turned to Black-beard.

"Who is this man, Baba Moustafa?"

Black-beard grinned again. He always grinned when he spoke, it seemed.

"I cannot swear, your worship, for there is so much witchcraft about that I doubt if I am myself. But this I know. If I am myself, this is my true master, Don Gonzalo Gonzales, son of the Count of Lara—"

He was interrupted by a smothered cry under the veil of Zeinab, and the face of Al Mansour himself changed to an expression of eager attention.

"Whom saidst thou?" asked the Vizier.

The black-bearded man stared at them as if astonished.

"Gonzalo Gonzales, Count of Lara, if your worship has no objection."

Al Mansour looked earnestly at the youth, whose proud gaze never flinched, and then observed in a low tone:

"I had thought all the children of Lara were dead."

Black-beard shook his head slowly.

"Nay, your worship. The Moors thought they had killed them all, but they forgot the babe in the Castle of Lara. One was born in

sorrow and trouble, while the Moors were raiding from Toledo to the Pyrenees, and many a day did I watch over his worship there, when he was in swaddling clothes."

The Vizier turned and looked in his wife's face with a strange glance, while the lady could be seen to tremble violently under her veil. There was a silence in the room for some minutes, no one venturing to interrupt the great Al Mansour, who at last roused himself and spoke huskily, as if with an effort.

"Let the kiaschefs and all retire. Be within call, but beware how ye listen. Leave the prisoners here."

The captain of the guards was apparently disturbed in mind as he retired, but he made no actual opposition, and the room was soon empty of all but the Vizier, his wife and the prisoners.

Then Al Mansour beckoned to Black-beard, who had been regarding the proceedings with an air of great wonder, and who readily approached.

"How didst thou leave the prison last night?" asked the Vizier suddenly.

Black-beard shook his head with a grin as he retorted:

"Your worship must ask some one else. It is not for me to betray counsel. We were out, and here we are in again. A plague on all the Prophets of Arabia! I'll follow them no more. I am Pepito Nunez, son of Nuno Salido, and I am here for denying my faith. I'll do it no more."

"Thou art the son of Nuno Salido, sayst thou? Then who is thy mother, good fellow?"

"Aldonza Lorenzo, my lord, an honest woman of the Asturias."

"Then thou art not Baba Moustafa?"

"Not unless your worship insists on it. Baba Moustafa, if my father had another son, is either dead or a slave to the Almogavars."

"How can that be? Tell me thy story in full, good fellow, and fear nothing."

The Vizier seemed to be intensely interested, and Pepito—for it was he—gave him a short account of the adventures which had ended in his capture near Toledo. All the while the other prisoner stood with his arms folded, wearing an air of proud indifference, as if he were bored with the whole performance.

When Pepito had finished, the Vizier smiled and observed very dryly:

"This story is very well till you get to the prison. But how did you get out, and how came you here?"

Pepito grinned.

"I cannot break counsel, your worship. We got out, no matter how, and traveled to the house of a friend, whence my master sent me to the market place to buy a dress for one of our party. As I was coming back I met my master alone in the road, and ere I could do more than greet him and show him the dress, these rude persons set on us and we had a fight. So that is how we came here."

Instantly the Vizier clapped his hands; a signal that brought in Yakoub Hamet.

"Where did you take these men?"

"Within a league of Medina Al Zohra, great lord. The dark one was coming from the city, the light one on the north road from Almaden."

"The Almaden road skirts the palace. He has been bidden there," muttered the Vizier to himself. "Mad girl! she will be ruined some day with her risks and tricks."

Aloud he said:

"That will do. Go."

As soon as the captain had retired Al Mansour addressed the prisoners in his gravest and most impressive manner.

"Your lives are forfeit by the laws of war. Ye have ventured to profane the harem of the Commander of the Faithful. Nevertheless, Al Mansour can afford to spare two Christian fools, betrayed by the glance of a bright eye. Don Gonzalo Gonzales, had not fortune once made me cruel and unjust to thy family against my will, this day should be thy last; but I pardon thee for the sake of one dear to me, and in memory of thy father's wrongs. Go back to Castile, and never let me see thy face again till thou hast avenged thy brethren by the blood of Ruy Velasquez and the Witch Lambra. Seven gallant sons of thy father were slain by my men through the magic deceptions of that witch; and the time has come to avenge them. Away with thee in very shame, then!"

Here Pepito, with his usual blunt manner broke in:

"Begging my lord's pardon, his worship here knows nothing of all this past history. It's the other one, I told it to."

Al Mansour did not seem to be offended by the honesty of the squire, for he even smiled as he asked:

"What other one, friend?"

"The other knight that I thought was my master, and whom I left by the Wizard's Castle," answered Pepito earnestly. "This is the real Don Gonzalo, and his father has not let him know the truth."

"Then tell him all; for 'tis a sin and a shame so fair a youth should be ignorant of his father's mortal foe," answered Al Mansour sharply.

"Go, both of ye. Take this ring for a safe conduct; and remember that I will have ye

both beheaded if ye are found in the dominions of the Caliph after four days. If ye would ever return, come with the heads of Ruy Velasquez and Lambra the Witch, and come straight hither. Farewell, Don Gonzalo, and good luck attend thee!"

He clasped his hands again, and said to the amazed Yakoub Hamet:

"Take a guard and escort these gentlemen to the frontier at once. They will return in a month or less, with two heads, those of a man and a woman. If they come without those, kill them. If they bring them, escort them to me. I have spoken."

He waved his hand as a token that the audience was over; but the younger prisoner advanced and bent his knee before him.

"Is it my father's will I should be Don Gonzalo Gonzales?" he asked in a strange tone.

"I have spoken," was the only answer, as Al Mansour averted his eyes from the other.

The prisoner rose.

"Be it so," he said. "I am a good Christian knight, and my name is Gonzalo Gonzales. Lead on."

Prisoners and guard filed from the room, and no sooner were they gone than the Vizier's wife threw aside her veil and eagerly addressed her husband.

"Al Mansour, there is witchcraft in this!"

The Vizier was not superstitious, so that he only smiled.

"No witchcraft, wife, only the wrong child."

"But you told me that—"

"I told thee that the child was brought to me by one of our raiding parties, as the new-born child of the Count of Lara, taken from beside its mother when they burned his castle, against my orders. I had not tamed these wild kings of Granada and Valencia in those days, and they did not obey me as they do now."

"But how comes it that—?"

"That this youth is the Count's son? I cannot say. My men cannot have deceived me or been mistaken. They did bring me the Count's son, and yet it does not seem that he had two sons."

"But he is so like?" said the lady in a low tone.

"Nay, for that matter, he may be a son of Lara not born in wedlock, good wife. See this squire. He says he is the son of Nuno Salido, and he is the image of Baba Moustafa, yet we know that Cadijah was the mother of one, and some Christian woman espoused Nuno after he fled hence and became the mother of the other."

"True, but we do not remember Baba Moustafa so well; and this youth spoke with the voice of Ali; looked out of Ali's eyes. He was the very counterfeit presentment of our adopted son, my lord. It must be some spell of the witch Lambra."

Al Mansour smiled slightly.

"Witchcraft for the dervishes, good wife. This youth is a brave one, but there is no witchcraft here."

"But how comes it that the squire says there are two of them? Our Ali is still in Morocco, my lord."

Al Mansour looked keenly at his wife.

"Art sure of that? By my father's beard, I would not be surprised to hear he was in Spain. Let it go. What is more to the purpose, our wild little princess cannot follow him now. Zeinab, that Christian was hidden in the harem till he came out to meet his squire, and now we shall see our Shooting Star come back to the palace to-night, with old Mousa, as if she had never left it. I must take order with her; for though Mousa is very discreet, he will get both into trouble some day. She runs too near the fire to escape burning forever."

The Vizier was much preoccupied all that day, and the next morning early sent to the palace to know whether the princess had returned with Mousa.

The answer that came back disturbed him greatly.

Neither had been heard of since the night before, and not a single word came from the knights who were scouring the country. The Princess Zoraya, Star of Cordova, daughter of the great Caliph, had disappeared as utterly as if she had never existed, from the midst of a populous country.

Then came a message from the Caliph, desiring to see his prime minister, and Al Mansour, for the first time in his life, began to feel uneasy.

He found the indolent monarch in a flurry of nervous excitement. He had but just been informed of his daughter's flight.

"You must find her, Al Mansour," was all he could say.

"On my head be it," answered Al Mansour.

CHAPTER XV.

PANCHITA.

THE Lady Francesca de Ximenes, more familiarly known as Panchita, sat at her chamber window in the Ursuline Nunnery, looking out over the landscape through eyes dimmed with tears.

She was thinking mournfully over her brief glimpse of love and happiness, and wondering

what had become of the false knight on whom she had thrown away her love.

"He was deceiving me all the while," she thought sadly to herself. "He loves Zoraya, and only amused his leisure with me; and now he has been gone five whole days, and I shall never see him more. Why did he take me at my word?"

Then Panchita began to weep, for she was very young and very much in love. The good nuns had treated her with the greatest kindness as soon as they found out her rank, and a message had been dispatched to her father informing him where she was, but in the mean time Panchita was all alone, and had little to do except weep for her absent lover.

Now, as she looked at the landscape through her falling tears, the gleam of sunlight on armor suddenly made its appearance in the valley, and very soon she could see a knight, followed by his squire, riding rapidly toward the convent.

Poor Panchita's heart began to jump, and she started up, murmuring:

"Oh, if it be he at last, bless him!"

She looked eagerly at the fast-approaching figures, and then a sick feeling came over her, for the nearer they came the more unlike her knight was the advancing cavalier.

Her knight had ridden a bright bay charger; this one bestrode a slender, delicate-looking gray, with a bluish shade, like the color of a wreath of smoke. The champion she had sent away was accoutered in light Moorish mail, with a bright green surcoat; this cavalier was locked in bright steel from crown to heel, and his surcoat, as well as the trappings of his saddle, were of a pale gray, like the color of his charger, giving him a strange, phantom-like appearance.

His visor was down so that she could not see his face, but there was something in the gallant grace with which he sat his steed and the way in which he held his long lance that seemed familiar to Panchita.

Whoever he might be, he came on straight toward the convent, and she began to think:

"It is he, perhaps, after all."

She looked at the squire riding in rear of the knight and could make nothing of him; for he also was completely equipped in steel and his face was hidden. Like his master, he rode a gray horse and was dressed in pale gray.

On they came, followed by the hoves and fears of Panchita, and at last stopped at the gate of the convent, when the knight sounded his bugle in a bold peal.

Then the girl clasped her hands in ecstasy and murmured:

"It is, it must be he, at last!"

She looked across the valley to the dark towers of the Wizard's Castle, and saw that the drawbridge had been lowered and that a little train of horsemen was coming from the fortress; but the sight did not alarm her.

She had been several days in the convent, and had seen a good deal of the castle people at a distance, but in all that time they had never been near the convent. She had heard from the nuns that Don Ruy Velasquez was a noble knight and a good patron of the nunnery, and had given herself no further concern in the matter, save to wonder sometimes wherefore Don Gonzalo and his squire had been so strangely moved at the name of the lord of the Wizard's Castle.

She threw open the lattice and leaned far out, listening intently to catch what was said at the gate, if she could; for the valley was silent as the grave in the vicinity of the convent.

She could hear voices, but could not distinguish words; and her vexation was fast increasing when she happened to cast her eyes over the landscape, and beheld the train from the castle rapidly nearing the convent gate, the horses going at a gallop.

At the head of the train rode a man in the black velvet robes of a noble of rank, and by his side was a lady in scarlet and black, while their followers were completely armed.

Just as she was wondering what could bring these people to the convent, came a tap at her door; and Sister Catherine, the sub-prioress, entered the room. Sister Catherine was an old woman who had not yet survived a passion for gossip; and she was full of news.

"Oh, Dona Francesca," she began; "there is a noble cavalier come from your father to take you home, and he says that you know his name."

"What is his name, sister?" asked Panchita trembling.

"Don Gonzalo Gonzales, son of—"

"It is true, I know him and I will trust him, sister," interrupted the lady breathlessly. "I am ready to go at once, if old Martinez will bring out my horse."

Martinez was the single male servant of the convent, an old man, nearly superannuated, who tended the convent garden, sold vegetables at the castle, and made himself generally useful.

Before sister Catherine could reply, they heard more voices at the gate, and the old nun exclaimed:

"If it be not the castle folks come to see us

at last! I thought they would be here when they heard we had a guest. No doubt they have come to invite you to the castle."

"But I cannot go there, sister. Think what a place it must be when they call it the Wizard's Castle. I should fear to enter those gloomy gates."

"It is true that the country people call it so, my child; but it cannot be true, for Dona Lambra is a good servant of the church, and has given us a silver lamp for the shrine of St. Ursula. They are very rich at the castle, and would entertain you royally, instead of letting you go off all alone with a single horse as you came."

"Nevertheless, if Don Gonzalo be willing to escort me, I must go, my sister, for I am wearying to see my home in Leon once more. Here is some one come to hurry me."

In fact, at that moment, Mother Agatha, Abbess of the convent, came bustling in, crying:

"Sister Catherine, why dost thou loiter here? Here are Don Ruy Velasquez and the Countess Lambra at the gate, craving audience of the Princess Francesca, and thou keepest her chattering like a magpie. Come down at once."

The Mother Superior was a stern, ill-tempered woman, used to having her own way unquestioned; and it is no wonder that she swept away all Panchita's faint remonstrances like wind, and carried her down to the convent parlor, where she found herself confronted by three people, two of whom she had never seen before, while the third was the knight in the ghostly armor, who stood at one side of the room with folded arms, his open visor revealing the face of Gonzalo Gonzales.

But he said nothing as she came into the room, nor did he offer to move forward, as Don Ruy Velasquez and the Lady Lambra rose from their seats and began to overwhelm Panchita with all sorts of compliments and excuses for not having sooner come to invite to their castle the distressed lady of whom they had only heard that very day.

"But now," cried Dona Lambra, "we insist—both my lord and myself—that the Princess Panchita abide in safety in our poor castle till such time as her father's train shall come to take her home."

Panchita looked timidly at them and felt an instinct of aversion that she could hardly explain. The Count of Castel Negro (the title of Ruy Velasquez) was a tall, handsome man, a little past forty, with a dark, haughty face; and the Countess Lambra was a woman of singular beauty, still in the plenitude of her charms; but still Panchita felt a shudder running through her as she answered hastily:

"I am very sad to disappoint the noble lady, but my father has sent for me already by this gentleman."

The count, who had his back to the knight in the corner of the room, turned his head in a stiff, haughty manner, as if to see who was there, and sneered slightly, while his wife went on volubly:

"Nay, sweetest princess, it is not possible that your father can mean you to travel through the Land of Castles alone like a damsel errant, beside a knight who cannot even afford to hire a litter to carry you properly."

Panchita colored deeply and replied with spirit:

"Madam, it is not for me to say that my father's messenger is unfit to escort my father's daughter. This gentleman is Don Gonzalo Gonzales, son of the Count of Lara and—"

Had a thunderbolt fallen into the room as she spoke, the effect on two of her hearers could hardly have been more marked.

The Countess Lambra uttered a faint shriek and started up from her chair, staring wide-eyed at the knight, while Ruy Velasquez wheeled round with a suddenness forcibly contrasting with his previous hauteur, and recoiled several paces, laying his hand on his sword, and trembling violently, with a ghastly face.

Panchita was so much amazed at the reception of her news that she could only regard her visitors amazedly; and then, much to her relief, the knight stepped forward and spoke with an ease and courtesy much at variance with the usual rude manners of the Gothic warriors:

"Fairest damsel," he said, "Gonzalo Gonzales claims the promise given to Ali Moudara, and is ready to take the lady Panchita to the Asturias, let who will interpose to prevent it. Is the lady willing to trust herself to my guidance?"

Panchita looked apprehensively at the count and countess, who were whispering together and glancing at the knight with strange looks.

Then she went to Gonzalo and clung to his arm, saying in a low voice:

"Anywhere away from them! Save me from them! There is black magic in their looks! See them!"

The knight eyed them steadily for awhile, and then observed:

"I see them, and shall know them, but the time is not yet. Let us go from hence, sweet Panchita, ere mischief come of it all."

But here the Abbess interposed as they were advancing to the door.

"Nay, sir knight; bethink you that this is

but poor treatment for the noble count who has invited the lady to his castle. In common courtesy—"

But the knight merely bowed and waved his hand as he replied:

"Holy mother, the count had not seen me, then. He will let us go."

"Ay, let them go, in God's name!" half whispered Ruy Velasquez. "We do not insist, Mother, we do not insist."

The Mother Superior looked amazed, but she made no more opposition; and the knight led Panchita down to the outer court of the convent, where they found the squire, whose open visor revealed the honest, sunburnt features of Pepito, holding two horses, one of them being the animal on which Panchita had come to the convent.

Outside the gate, dismounted from their horses and scattered lazily about, were the vassals of Ruy Velasquez; and they did not seem to pay much attention as the knight, followed by Pepito and escorting Panchita, rode out of the gate and took the way up the valley.

Once out of earshot, the cavalier turned to Panchita, and said in a low tone:

"Sweet lady, I have deceived you. I come not from your father, but I am ready to take you to him, or at least to carry you to the train that is coming to meet you. I was Ali Moudara, but I am Gonzalo Gonzales, who loves you and none but you. Will you trust me?"

Panchita trembled and began to weep.

"Whom can I trust when you have deceived me? How am I to know that you will take me to my father? Oh, Don Gonzalo, why have you done this?"

"Because I love you and would not give another the privilege of guarding you from danger. Because you are in danger in this valley."

"From whom?"

"From yonder wicked knight and worse lady. Pepito has told me things about them that would freeze your very blood. You saw how they blanched at my name. Panchita, they had reason, for they have foully wronged the name of Lara."

"And if I trust you—?"

"I will take you safe to Oviedo, where your father lives, or I will yield you to any person coming from him. Remember, lady, that you are the captive of my sword and spear; that I rescued you from the Moors as Ali Moudara, and can do the same in Spain as Gonzalo Gonzales."

"I will trust Gonzalo anywhere; so lead on," replied Panchita cheerfully; and then they urged their horses to a gallop, and swept away up the valley, passing under the walls of the Wizard's Castle and taking the road to Burgos, unmolested by all.

The sun had declined from the zenith and the afternoon shadows began to creep slowly over the valley, when they saw a cloud of dust ahead of them, and Pepito, the squire, called out to his master:

"Beware, master mine, yonder comes a company of fellows that will not be denied by one man. They are a troop of free lances going to Moorland."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAUNTED KNIGHT.

RUY VELASQUEZ and the Countess Lambra did not emerge from the convent for several hours after Panchita had left it under the guardianship of her knight; and when they came out the vassals noticed that they were unusually silent and morose. The count was no angel at the best of times, but his wife, who prided herself on her powers of fascination, was generally gracious to all her retainers.

This day she too proved cross and severe, scolded every one about her, and retired to her own chamber as soon as she reached the castle, while the count called for wine and drank deeply, as if determined to drown his cares.

The evening drew on, and it was time for supper, and still neither the lord nor lady of the castle made their appearance in the hall, when the loud notes of a bugle at the castle gate announced that some one was demanding admittance and hospitality in the fashion of the day.

The warder looked out of the little window above the portcullis, and beheld a knight in gray armor on a gray horse waiting at the further side of the moat, accompanied by a squire and a little page as black as jet habited in the Morisco fashion.

"Who art thou, and what wouldst thou?" demanded the warder in stentorian tones, to which the knight replied:

"A cavalier escaped from the power of the Moors craves hospitality for himself and his followers. We are on our way to Burgos."

"Wait till I see my master," quoth the warder, who left the window and presently returned, saying:

"The noble cavalier is welcome, and my master will see that he is well cared for."

Then the drawbridge descended, the portcullis rose, and the knight rode into the castle court, followed by the black page and squire.

They were received with great courtesy by

the white-headed seneschal, who ushered them to rooms in the donjon, and then inquired:

"What name shall I give to my noble master, sir knight?"

The cavalier hesitated a moment, and finally replied:

"Tell your lord that I am under a vow to speak no name till I have performed a task given to me, and that if he wishes to address me he can call me 'The Haunted Knight.'"

The old man stared.

"The Haunted Knight! But you are flesh and blood, sir knight."

"So I seem," returned the other, with a mysterious smile, "but I am haunted by a phantom that hath taken my name and place, and I must destroy it ere I can resume my proper appellation."

The seneschal stared harder than before, but then muttered:

"Be it so. Farewell, Sir Haunted."

He bowed and left the room, while the knight turned to the little black slave, who had followed him into the room, and said:

"Thou seest that in our lands, though we have not the riches of which you boast in Cordova, we have a courtesy that forbids us to press a guest unduly for his name."

"And why should you not give your name to them?" asked the little slave, saucily. "Methinks this is a fair castle, and that we are in no more danger from Al Mansour's soldiers. Why should we not declare who we are at once?"

"Because I do not know the lord of this castle," replied the knight, gravely. "He may be a good cavalier, and all this precaution useless, but he may be a bad man, for there are such in all parts of the world."

"Except among the Christians," retorted the little slave, in a tone of some mockery, to which the knight answered nothing; for at that moment came a tap on the door, and his squire, a tall, bulky person, still in armor, with his visor down, entered the room, saying, in a curious little squeaking voice to come from so large a frame:

"It is time the princess—"

"Silence!" angrily cried the little black slave.

"Knowest thou not thy nephew Zadok?"

The big squire hesitated and stammered in his words as he said:

"I crave pardon, but I am not used to these Christian ways yet. It is time for the lady to—"

The little slave stamped his foot, ran at the big squire and slapped him viciously.

"I am Zadok, thou old camel of the Atlas!" cried the child, angrily. "See that thou call me nothing else."

The big squire laughed in the hollow of his helmet, as he retorted:

"Then I ought to whip thee for impudence if thou art Zadok. Come, shall I do it?"

In a moment the little slave had skipped away behind the knight, and was making faces at the big squire behind the protection of his master, while the knight was smiling at the little quarrel.

Then the squire raised his visor and discovered the fat face of an old negro, looking unusually grave as he expostulated:

"Noble knight, we have periled all for thee, and I have lost my place and forfeited my life to bring thee hither in safety. Thou canst not surely have the heart to do us harm now. It is time you were separated and that the boy came with me, since boy it is to be. I am the only person he is safe with, if ever we are to go back home again."

The knight seemed to be touched by the appeal, for he answered:

"I know it, good Mousa. But for thy good management we had been taken by the kiaschefs a hundred times. But bethink thee that I seek only to join with the lady in honorable bonds of Christian marriage as soon as we reach my father's castle."

Old Mousa gave a dry sort of grunt as he retorted:

"An honorable marriage it will be truly, between a landless young knight, with no possessions but a stolen horse and arms, and the daughter of a Successor of the Prophet."

"Be that as it may," said the knight, calmly; "the lady has chosen me and I can do no less than be faithful. What shouldst thou know of the holy sentiment of chivalry? Be silent if thou canst do naught but sneer at a Christian knight."

Little Zadok, whose identity the experienced reader has long ago found out, clapped his hands and cried out with a gay laugh:

"Well done, knight! Well done, Mousa! This is better sport a thousand times than dreaming away one's days in the harem at Al Zobra. What fun we had on the road to Ali Moudara's castle, where we tricked them into giving us the knight's best horse and armor, with an outfit for thee, Mousa! And the best of all is that we have tricked the great Al Mansour, who fancied himself to be the wisest man in Spain. But now it is getting time for us to think of our bodies, my Ali; for I am most unlover-like in my hunger. How do they name the lord of this castle, Mousa?"

"I know not," answered the old negro sulkily.

"I would we were out of the place, and had left this knight to roam alone; for I see nothing but evil in this frolic."

"And dost thou know the name of the castle, my Ali?" continued the page, turning to the knight.

"Not I. How should I? My father's lands are far from this. It was the first place we came to on the road, and I have asked hospitality, as I should be ready to afford it to any strange knight belated."

Zadok laughed merrily.

"What people are these Christians fast becoming! They are already imitating the Moors in their ideas of hospitality. But here comes one to tell us supper is ready. I must go with Mousa, while you sit at the lord's table! What a hard lot is that of a slave!"

With an affected sigh the disguised princess followed her master and Mousa, down the long corridors to the great hall behind the old seneschal who came to announce to them that supper was ready.

They found the hall fully lighted, the retainers ranged in lines along the walls, waiting for their lord, and as they entered, the count and Lady Lambra came to meet them from the doors opposite to those at which they entered.

The knight had not laid aside any of his armor save the helmet, and his head was bare as he advanced to meet Don Ruy Velasquez. He had long golden hair, a handsome young face with a downy blonde mustache, and the fresh color of his cheek was as much unlike that of a phantom as could be imagined; nevertheless his appearance produced a startling effect on both count and countess.

The former stopped, the words of welcome frozen on his lips, while the lady turned deadly pale and faltered out:

"Again! Again!"

The knight bowed quietly before them, as if to avoid noticing their manifest perturbation, but still they continued to stare at him, till Ruy Velasquez, in hollow tones demanded:

"In the name of God, art thou real or a phantom indeed?"

The knight smiled slightly, for he interpreted their confusion as superstitious fear, owing to the seneschal's report.

"I cannot say," he answered. "I am the Haunted Knight, haunted by a double that is forever pouring disgrace on me. Till I meet and slay him, I am none but Sir Haunted."

The count seemed slightly relieved by this answer.

"Then thou art not he I saw at the convent of St. Ursula this morning?"

The Haunted Knight started in turn and asked with savage eagerness:

"Didst see the sorcerer? Didst see my double to day? Whither went he, my lord? Where is he?"

Ruy Velasquez looked at his wife in a manner full of hidden meaning, ere he answered:

"Dost thou know him then?"

"No, no, I tell thee, no! I have never seen him yet. But, mortal or man, if ever I do, let him beware! My lord, where saw you him, I pray?"

"At the convent of St. Ursula, with the Lady Panchita, whom he took away on the road to Burgos—"

Ere he could finish, the knight had turned to the door and was about to run back to his room without further ceremony, when he suddenly remembered his host and returned, saying:

"My lord, I cannot eat under your roof this night. I must away at once; for unless I meet this evil spirit that haunts me, I am undone forever. I pray you to let my squire and this little slave follow me in the morning, when they have rested and eaten. For me, I have a vow which cannot be broken."

The count bowed courteously, his pale face lighting up with a smile of great relief as he replied:

"I grieve to see thee depart, Sir Haunted; but since thou art determined to go I may not stay thee for courtesy's sake."

"I thank thee, and am gone," answered the Haunted Knight hastily; and then he rushed up to his own room, and was heard in a trice clattering down the corridors to the castle stables, fastening his helmet as he went.

Mousa and the disguised princess, thus left alone in the strange castle, drew closer together in some uneasiness, and Zoraya whispered:

"We must away too, old bear. I do not trust the looks of this Count and lady."

Mousa nodded silently, but made no reply, for the count at that moment addressed him in the haughty and contemptuous style he used with his inferiors:

"Here, fellow; how comest thou, a black slave, to be following a Christian?"

"The noble knight promised to make my nephew and myself free if we would help him," answered Mousa, humbly.

"Thy nephew? Is that black imp thy nephew?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Is he for sale? My wife wants a little bower boy."

"Nay, my lord, I could not sell him without the leave of the most noble knight, my master."

"And who is this most noble knight, thy master?"

"I cannot say, my lord. He was a prisoner in Cordova till we let him out of the prison and fled with him to the north."

"Who art thou, then?"

"I am Mousa Abd-el-Khaleef,* the fig merchant of Cordova."

"And how name ye the boy?"

"Zadok, my lord."

"What do you call your master?"

"Master, my lord."

"Has he no name, then?"

"None that I know, my lord, though they say he is very like Ali Moudara, Sheer al Gebel, the adopted son of the great Al Mansour."

Don Roy Velasquez listened eagerly to Mousa as he said this.

"And this Ali Moudara, where is he now, think you?"

"In Africa, my lord. He was sent there to the tents of the Berbers to learn the best points of the art of war, and is not likely to return before next year."

Then the count's color faded away again as he turned with a shudder to his wife and whispered:

"It must be a phantom, after all. Let us test it."

Without further noticing Mousa or casting so much as a glance on the supposed slave boy, Don Ruy turned to the table and began his supper, evidently in a terribly bad temper, for he frowned while he was eating, and drank a good deal more than he ate.

Very soon he called up to him his squire and whispered something in his ear. The squire, a dark and villainous-looking fellow, nodded silent acquiescence, and went to the lower end of the hall, where he beckoned to a couple of men-at-arms, who rose from table and followed him without speaking.

Mousa, who was sitting at the lower table among the humbler of the retainers, with the supposed boy by his side, noticed this and turned to Zadok, remarking in Arabic:

"They have gone off to kill your fine young knight, princess. There is a devil of murder in the eye of the lord yonder, that looks out of all his disguises. We shall have to go back to Cordova alone."

"Instead of that, old camel, we will follow after my knight, and warn him of his danger. Thou hast a trick of cutting off heads which I have heard thee boast. Now let us see whether it will serve thee in need."

Mousa made no answer, but went on eating a most enormous supper, while the nervous little being beside him toyed with the food, flattered, pinched the old negro, and at last whispered:

"If thou dost not rise, I will go by myself in a moment more."

Then Mousa got up with an air of great regret, and answered with his mouth full:

"Thou art a very glutton, Zadok, that will not let thine old uncle eat in peace when he is starved; but come along and let us depart."

No one affected to take any notice of them, for they were looked on as mere slaves, and a few minutes later they were at the castle stables leading out their animals.

Thanks to the wit of Zoraya and the long experience of Mousa, they had made good their escape among a thousand perils from the kiaschets of Al Mansour, assuming various disguises and traveling by circuitous routes, till they had reached the borders of Cas ile.

Here, by a stroke of audacity, which only the wild "Shooting Star" could have compassed, they boldly entered one of Al Mansour's castles on the frontier, and announced themselves as Ali Moudara, just come back from Africa with two slaves.

The ruse succeeded, thanks to the marvelous resemblance between Zoraya's knight and the absent chief, wherefore they had been supplied with the armor and horses wherewith they had approached the Wizard's Castle, not knowing to whom it belonged.

Now Mousa and the seeming boy mounted and rode over the drawbridge into the night, followed by the warder's surly benediction:

"The Virgin protect ye for a pair of fools. There are robbers abroad, and ye may want to come back when 'tis too late."

But Zoraya heaved a deep sigh of relief as she rode away.

"Let who will come, they will be better than yonder castle's lord. Let us ride fast, Mousa, to find my knight."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FREE LANCES.

A COMPANY of armed men, headed by three fierce-looking chiefs in armor a little bet-

* Abd-el Khaleef, "servant of the Caliph." The prefix "Abd-el," "servant of the," is still very common in Arabic and Moorish names. "Abd-el-Kahman," "Abd-el-Akhar," "Abd-el-Kerim," "Abd-el-Allah," "Abd-el-Kader," are common examples, meaning respectively servant of, the Merciful, the Powerful, the Great, of God, of the Wise One, etc. Mousa indicates his real station by his surname. "Khaleef," or Caliph, means "The Successor" (of the Prophet, understood).

ter than the others could afford, was coming down the road to Toledo from Burgos, when one of the chiefs cried out:

"A prize! a prize! Yonder comes one of those fools of knight-errants with a lady."

They were a villainous-looking company that were headed by the man who spoke these words. Their armor was rusty and of various patterns, and looked as if it had been picked up in all sorts of places, as it had been. The three chiefs were large, powerful men, with cruel, determined faces, and seemed to owe their superiority over their companions chiefly to physical strength.

None of the three wore the golden spurs of knighthood nor seemed imbued with any portion of the courtesy of chivalry.

They looked, as they were, "free lances," (alias robbers) at any man's beck and call to murder or plunder. A stain on the age they disgraced, they were the excuse for the institution of knight-errantry, to redress the wrongs they daily did.

"To the foul fiend with all knights errant," growled the second chief. "We'll kill the man and take his lady."

"Ay, ay," was the approving chorus, as these precious scoundrels rode forward to meet the knight errant.

They could see him afar off, a knight all in white or very pale gray, on a horse of the same color, and followed by a squire accoutered in the same grizzly hue. Beside the knight rode a lady in a long white vail on a gray horse.

Immediately the free lances began to scatter across the road as a signal to those coming that they intended to dispute the passage.

It was Panchita and her protectors whom they saw, and it was Pepito whose warning cry to his master prepared him for the peril to come.

"We must ride into the mountains to escape these villains, master," said the cautious squire. "There are too many for us to fight, and the lady must be saved from their clutches."

The knight looked long and keenly at the advancing line, and then took his resolution quickly.

"They have slow, heavy horses, and we are mounted on the best blood of Morocco. Do thou remain in the rear with the lady, and I will cut my way through them. Then, when they are fully engaged with me, do thou ride for the mountains, skirt the edge of this valley, and come into the road behind them. If I am slain, ride hard for the city of Burgos."

But here Panchita interposed with a voice denoting extreme terror.

"In God's name, my lord, do not this foolish thing! What can I do without thee now? They will slay thee."

The knight turned to her with a grave sweet smile, as he asked:

"Would the Flower of all Ladies have her knight turn his back on a rabble of robbers like this? There are duties as well as pleasures in chivalry, lady mine; and we have no time to lose. Give me thy love to cheer me in the fight, and I shall prevail, as thou wilt see."

"Thou hast my true love, Don Gonzalo, but I beseech thee be not rash," was the sobbing answer; and then the knight kissed her hand, closed his visor, and set off like an arrow from the bow to meet the advancing company of free lances, now less than a mile off.

No sooner had he gone, than Pepito seized Panchita's bridle and started for the mountains at a rapid pace, defying the pursuit of the free lances, who were mounted on all sorts of wretched nags, ill-cared for and incapable of much work against a good cavalry.

The separation of the three, however, had the effect that might have been foreseen. The robbers, anxious for prey, divided themselves at once, part chasing the squire and lady, part advancing to meet the single knight. Secure in their numbers—for they were nearly fifty men—they anticipated an easy victory, and galloped madly on, scattered, according to the speed of their horses, in irregular groups.

The sun was already low in the horizon and shone in their faces, while the knight, coming from the south-west, had it behind him, and was quite untrammelled in choosing his opponent. His swift charger swept on like the wind, and very soon he met the three leaders of the robbers, stringing along, one after the other, ahead of their men.

Like a flash he passed the first, a swerve of his horse causing the robber's lance to miss its aim, while the knight's long weapon, which bore a broad Moorish blade at the end, struck

the ruffian on the side of the face—for he had no visor—cut a deep blinding gash in the cheek under the eye and glanced off.

The next man, seeing the defeat of his leader, swerved to one side just in time to receive one of those glancing lance-cuts on the back of his neck, slight but deadly; for he fell from his saddle in a moment, stone dead, the spinal marrow severed.

The third robber rushed on to close, and drove his lance all to splinters on the knight's shield, but received the long, double-edged blade in his own eye at the same moment, the keen weapon piercing his brain.

Thus, inside of a minute, three large, powerful men were entirely discomfited by a single antagonist, all on account of their want of visors; while the rest of the robbers, who were even less completely armed, scattered in dismay before the swift onset of this terrible knight, who rode so gracefully and seemed to execute his feats with so much ease.

The white knight did not seek any enemies. As soon as the robbers cleared the road for him, he pursued the way in which he had come, after extricating the point of his spear from the head of the dead chief, and then swept round to the right to meet Pepito and the lady, whom a party of the robbers were trying to intercept.

Before he could get there, however, the squire had turned up into a mountain gully after the lady, whose horse had apparently taken fright, closely pursued by a party of the best mounted robbers, who followed at his haunches.

These fellows were unprovided with armor while their horses were the lightest in the band, and they had followed the radius of the circle, while Pepito and Panchita had been vainly trying to outstrip them, though going three times the distance.

Thus, when the knight turned off from the road to succor his squire and lady, the robbers had succeeded in their design of driving the party from the direction of Burgos, and were following, in a medley, up a steep mountain gully, which led in some unknown direction.

No sooner did the free lances in the main valley see the knight leave the road, which brought his back to them, than they raised a shout of triumph and went racing after him. The very men who had shrunk from his threatening advance were the first to pursue him as soon as his back was turned.

The knight gained the mouth of the gully and looked up. Far ahead he could see Panchita's white figure, all alone, her horse laboring, but going very fast, toward a cross ravine that led into some upper valley, while Pepito had turned, about half-way down, and was closely engaged with at least a dozen robbers. His horse was down, but the squire, alone on foot, with his old Almogavar tactics, was making his antagonists keep back with vicious "jabs" of his long spear. The knight raised a loud shout of encouragement to his squire and galloped up the gully, where his arrival soon put to flight the robbers, unprovided as they were with armor.

They turned and came tearing down the gully at full speed, keeping to the sides to escape the lance of the knight; and he let them all pass him save one, whom he smote from his horse with a side blow of his lance, taking his horse and leading it up to Pepito.

"By my faith, master mine, that was a close touch of the razor to an honest man's beard," observed the squire as he mounted the robber's horse. "Look down the pass, how thick are the villains!"

In fact the robbers had collected in a crowd at the bottom of the pass, where they seemed disposed to resist any return to the road, and their numbers made it a matter of wonder how two men had ever escaped them.

But the knight only gave them a passing glance, for he was very anxious about Panchita, who had now disappeared in the upper passes of the mountain.

"Up, Pepito, and let us follow her," he said. "The sun is setting, and we shall have much ado to find her. How camest thou to leave her?"

"Faith, master mine, for the best of all reasons. Her horse outran mine, for it carried a hundred pounds less than mine, with me and my armor. Besides, both lady and horse were roundly frightened or I much mistake, for she plied the whip all the way up the gully and I warrant me her beast is black with sweat ere this."

His master cut short his discourse by lead-

ing the way up the mountain side, and the shades of twilight began to close in on them as they reached the cross ravine, up which they had seen Panchita ride when she disappeared.

There was no sign of white horse or white-vailed rider up the ravine, and the knight paused irresolute, till Pepito observed:

"There are the hoof-tracks, your worship. The lady has gone this way, and we must follow if we hope to find her."

The knight nodded and urged on his horse, followed by the squire. The two rode on as rapidly as the rough way and faint light would permit them, till the twilight faded into complete darkness, and still they saw nothing of the fugitive.

After a while they were obliged to dismount and advance on foot, leading their chargers, picking their way over loose rocks, only guided by the starlit opening, flanked by huge walls of black rock, which told them where was the summit of the pass.

At last they reached this place, and found that they were on the shoulder of part of the mountain, with a descent on the other side into a valley that looked like a black andathomless abyss in the darkness.

"Well, master mine," observed Pepito ruefully, "if the lady be down there to-night, she may wish she had not let her fears outrun her reason. What shall we do now?"

The knight looked all round him ere he answered. Overhead was the starlit sky, with the dark rugged heads of the mountains outlined against it, below them was the black valley; and near by, a wood darker than the valley.

"I will wind my horn," quoth the cavalier, musingly. "She will hear it if she is near, and will answer us."

"Ay, and those gentlemen below will hear it and sneak up after us in the dark," replied Pepito dryly. "No, no, your worship. If the lady is near she will hear your worship's voice and know it better than all the horns in Spain. Doubtless she is hiding in the woods, afraid to come forth."

"Thou art right, Pepito," rejoined his master; and forthwith he began to call, at first in low tones, but then louder, till he waked the echoes all round them:

"Panchita! Lady mine! Where art thou? We are all safe. Come forth!"

Again and again he called, but the mocking echoes alone repeated the sound, and no answer came back.

Panchita had disappeared.

The knight paused a moment, then turned his horse and rode back, saying:

"Stay thou here till morning, Pepito. She may have returned to the plain."

Then he, too, disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIDE AND SEEK.

WHEN Mousa and Zoraya rode out of the Wizard's Castle it was already night, but they could see the light color of the Burgos road leading to the north-east, and followed it boldly.

It was the princess, fearless as ever from long immunity, and not yet cowed by adversity, who led the way; for Mousa, though an old executioner, devoid of most human passions, was by no means as bold as his mistress. He was, moreover, unused to the weight of the armor he was carrying, and fond of his ease; therefore it was with many growls, concealed and aloud, that he followed the flying white steed of his giddy mistress.

Zoraya, on her part, felt so secure in her disguise that she was tempted to run into all sorts of perils for the mere frolic of the adventure. She could see that no one suspected either her sex or color, for her luxuriant black hair was coiled close to her head, concealed by a woolly wig, and her skin had been carefully dyed with a dye that would not wash off without chemicals, in which the Moors were quite learned.

She rode a white Arab, to which her light weight was but as a feather, and the bulky Mousa had to keep urging his own horse all the time to maintain anything like a proper distance between them.

Thus they rode on at a rapid pace for about half an hour, when they saw before them in the road three dark figures, and heard the clatter of hoofs and armor that told where the squire and retainers of the Count Velasquez were trotting rapidly on.

Then Zoraya slackened her pace and allowed Mousa to come up beside her.

"I told thee so," whispered the little impostor, in a tone of gleeful excitement. "Those men are going after my Ali Moudara, to slay him by treachery, and we must stop them."

"How?" asked Mousa, doubtfully.

"How, indeed!" was the scornful reply. "Thou an old swordsman and dost not know! I'll show thee!"

As part of his disguise as a black slave of the harem, the seeming Zadok bore a small scimitar, a slender weapon curved like a sickle, and not much longer. In speaking, the boy flashed this out in the starlight, and said to Mousa:

"Come along, old camel, and let us see which can cut best. These horses must not stir another step on the road to Burgos after we reach them. Dost understand?"

Mousa showed his white teeth for answer, and drew his own scimitar, which he had carried with him all the way from the palace of Al Zohra, as too precious a thing to be parted from.

With that scimitar, slender and slight as it was, Mousa had cut off many a head at the command of his master, and the feeling of its handle always encouraged him to smile.

"They shall stay where they are, princess," was all he answered as they galloped on after the trotting men-at-arms, whom they rapidly overhauled.

No sooner did the latter hear the clatter of hoofs in pursuit than they halted, and one of them shouted:

"Who in the fiend's name comes after us so fast? Did the count send ye?"

"Ay, ay," cried the boy on the white horse, in his childish tones. "We have a message for ye."

"And who are ye?" asked the count's squire, gruffly, as they rode up. "Why, as I live, it's the two blacks of this cursed Phantom Knight."

"Ay, ay; we're seeking our master," cried the boy, as if breathless. "Is he yet ahead? The good count told us to ride on and tell ye all to hurry and return before the dawn breaks, with what ye know. May we ride with ye?"

"Assuredly ye ride nowhere else," growled the squire, gruffly. "Here Flubbertigibbet, ride thou close beside my horse, and, look thou, try not to pass us to warn thy master, on pain of death. Garcia and Concho, take the black beast between ye and ride on."

The two seeming slaves made no objection to this, and the three men-at-arms, having thus secured them, as they thought, trotted on again over the dark road to Burgos, in pursuit of the Phantom Knight.

For several minutes not a word broke the monotonous clatter of the horse-hoofs on the hard road, and then, all on a sudden, the squire uttered a savage curse, and his horse halted as suddenly as if it had been shot, then limped forward a few steps on three legs, dead lame.

In the same instant the boy on the white horse swept off at full speed with a taunting laugh, while Mousa, with one of his old back strokes, took his right-hand captor across the throat above his gorget, and sent his head rolling into the road.

A second stroke ere his left-hand neighbor understood what it was all about, laid a horse dead, and then Mousa galloped away, leaving behind him two utterly amazed and demoralized murderers, a dead man and horse, and a second horse crippled for life. The only sound heard was a heavy charger, utterly unable to follow their fleet steeds, and the two fugitives laughed at the sudden confusion of their foes as they galloped on.

"That villainous count can try to entrap other men, but let him beware how he sets snares for my knight," observed Zoraya snapping her white teeth viciously.

"Now, Mousa, let us hasten on."

Mousa made no further objections; for his blood was up. The sudden silent strokes he had just dealt were exactly in the line of his old profession. Mousa was not fond of fighting, but he loved cutting off heads neatly.

They galloped steadily on, hour after hour, till they had passed out of the valley, entered another, and began to see some lights ahead.

"Yonder are houses, Mousa," observed the disguised princess. "Perhaps my knight will stop there."

But Mousa slackened his pace at once.

"Those are no houses: they are camp-fires,

gracious princess. Let us go slower. We know not who these men may be."

But Zoraya or Zadok, as the disguised slave boy may be called, only laughed giddily and galloped on.

"Whoever they are, old camel, we must find our knight," cried the boy saucily. "If thou art afraid, stay behind and leave them to me."

So they galloped steadily on and soon came in full view of the camp-fires, around which were scattered groups of the ruffianly free-lances, while the Phantom Knight came in sight at the same moment, riding out from the side of the valley and charging straight into among the sleeping robbers with a loud shout.

"Now, Mousa, do thy best," screamed the false Zadok as he drew his little scimitar, which, for all its small size, was as sharp as a razor.

Then the fearless little creature, who had never known danger, galloped into the midst of the camp-fires among the ruffianly free-lances, just as the Phantom Knight swept in at the other side, while Mousa, hovered on the outskirts, yelling in his shrill tones.

The effect of this sudden attack was remarkable. There were nearly fifty men lying round the fires, half armed or unarmed; and as soon as they heard the shouts they leaped up, bewildered, and began to scatter. A few turned to oppose the tall figure of the Phantom Knight, only to go down beneath his lance, while others, with more resolution, rushed to meet Zadok; but the majority either ran away or stood stupidly, not knowing which way to turn.

As for Zadok, that giddy little warrior was not so giddy but that he took care to keep out of the reach of the ugly swords and axes of the men that turned to fight, confining himself to cutting the fugitives over the back and shrieking most valorously.

But it was not long before the amazed freebooters, who thought that they had driven this very knight to the mountains, and saw him reappear as terrible as ever, began to take heart when they found they only had three antagonists.

A few of them jumped on their horses without waiting to saddle, and chased old Mousa down the valley; while the rest gathered so thickly round the Phantom Knight, that they obliged him to retreat, fighting all the while, and finally to trust to the speed of his horse to escape, going up the valley toward Burgos.

It was not strange that when the knight finally fled, the black page should follow his protector Zadok, in his ignorance of danger, had imagined he had only to rush in and see all his enemies flee; but when they turned to fight and he saw the blows strike his knight more than once, the little slave began to quake under all the disguise which hid the princess.

Therefore it was not long before the page found himself far ahead of all the rest, galloping up the valley, followed by the knight on the gray horse, who was in turn followed by a rabble of shouting pursuers.

On they went, hour after hour, till the moon began to rise over the mountains, while the shouts of their pursuers died away in the distance; and, far ahead of them, they could see a twinkling light that seemed as if it came from a turret window.

Then Zadok slackened his pace and allowed his knight to come up, when he gayly greeted him with the salutation, half in jest:

"Who would have thought that a valiant knight would run from a few robbers? Out on thee! I thought thou wast a great warrior, Ali Moudara."

The moon had cleared the top of the mountain, and they could see each other's faces plainly by the dim light.

Much to the surprise of the little madcap, the knight looked sternly at Zadok and coldly demanded:

"Who art thou that waggest thy tongue so freely at Ali Moudara? By the beard of my father, 'tis the imp Zadok that they told us of! Let this teach thee manners, thou spirit of Eblis!"

And ere the disguised princess could understand her position, the knight had seized her by the collar, given her a vigorous shaking, and ended by cuffing both ears soundly with the open palm of his hand.

To say that the wild princess was amazed at this treatment is mild language. She was utterly confounded, thunderstruck and dismayed. From the moment he released her,

half-stunned with the blows, sick and dizzy with the shaking, she drooped her head down on her saddle-bow and all her bravery left her. The wild girl, who had aped the boy in pure lightness of heart, became in a moment the frightened woman, shrinking with inexpressible horror from physical violence. And then Zoraya broke down and sobbed bitterly.

The knight seemed to be too much chafed and angry to commiserate her plight, for he continued fiercely:

"What meanest thou by coming out in that white mantle, on a horse like my lady's, to cheat me into following thee, thou imp of darkness? By the beard of Al Mansour, I thought it was my Panchita, and find only thee. Whence comest thou?"

Zoraya raised her head and looked in dire dismay at the knight.

"Could this be her cavalier, who spoke insultingly to her, struck her, and openly boasted to her of his love for Panchita?"

Alas! there was no mistaking his every feature and point of equipment. Then a great lamp seemed to come into her throat, and she spoke in a choked tone:

"Thy Panchita! Has it come to this?"

The knight frowned haughtily.

"Thou imp of darkness, what dost thou mean by mentioning the lady's name without a title?"

"Because I hate her, the pale-faced, yellow-haired—"

She had got thus far, fairly stung to fury at last, when the knight made another clutch at her head, and in so doing snatched off the woolly wig, and loosened Zoraya's magnificent long hair, till it fell over the horse's croup like a cascade of black silk.

The sight seemed to amaze him so much that his hand paused in mid-air, as he ejaculated:

"Prophet of Allah! 'Tis a girl!"

But Zoraya was too much worked up to heed his tone of amazement.

Bursting into a flood of angry tears, she sobbed out:

"Is this thy knighthood, base and ungrateful? Have I chosen thee from all others, abandoned my home to roam with thee, periled life and fair fame, to be thus treated? Just Allah! has it come to this, that the Star of Cordova should be struck like a slave by a man, who boasts that he loves Panchita?"

The reaction of pride and insulted dignity checked her tears, and she grew hysterical with anger and grief, while the knight sat on his horse, looking silently at her.

As soon as she stopped for breath he interposed, in a tone whose gentleness contrasted forcibly with his previous harsh manner:

"In the name of Allah, maiden, I ask thee, who art thou? Is it possible that thou art the runaway princess of whom the kiaschefs told us?"

Zoraya turned on him with a glance of haughty indignation.

"How darest thou question me? Runaway princess indeed! Who was it tempted me from home with his soft speeches, swearing to love me forever?"

"Not I, by the throne of the Mighty One, lady? Ali Moudara has never yet been false to his Panchita, the peerless beauty of the world."

Zoraya could stand it no longer. Her nature, petted and indulged from childhood was brimful of jealousy, and this open praise of a rival was fairly maddening to her. Uttering a shrill cry of rage she raised her tiny hand and smote the knight in the face, screaming:

"Base wretch! Kill me if thou wilt but give that to Panchita!"

The cavalier did not offer to ward off the blow, but his face grew pale in the moonlight as he said slowly and gravely:

"I struck thee innocently, thinking thee a saucy boy; but thou hast done a deed for which another must pay. I am not thy lover, as thou thinkest, but Ali Moudara, son of Al Mansour; and thou, as I think, art the foolish princess Zoraya, that hath sold the honor of a true believer to a Christian dog, one Gonzalo Gonzales. Where is this man fled to?"

Zoraya had been listening to him with a face that began to work with various emotions. When he had finished she faltered out:

"What! Art thou not my knight indeed and in truth?"

"Indeed and in truth I am Ali Moudara, hunting out the foul impostor who hath stolen

my name and property; entered my castle when I was absent; caused my father and mother to deny me; and finally hath stolen away a great princess, disguising her into the likeness of a black slave, to the shame of all the world."

Every word spoken by the knight seemed to go through the heart of the giddy princess like a stab. She drooped her head lower and lower and finally fell forward on the pommel of her saddle overcome with shame and confusion her black hair falling like a veil over her disguised face.

"Oh what shall I do?" she murmured. "Where shall I go?"

The knight's face softened as he looked at her bumbled demeanor.

"Who came here with thee, most foolish of princesses?" he asked.

"Old Mousa—and—he," she whispered.

"Old Mousa, sayest thou? And has he been with thee all the time, lady?"

"Night and day, he never left me till just now when the robbers parted us."

"It is well—better than I hoped. We must find old Mousa, and thou must return to the dress of thy sex and rank, and to Cordova with him."

"Oh, I cannot, now. I dare not. I must find him first."

"Whom, lady?"

"My knight."

And Zoraya, for the first time, threw back her hair with a proud motion and looked Ali Moudara in the face.

But the Moorish knight in the Christian armor set his face into a stern hard look.

"I will find him," he said. "Be not uneasy, princess, I will find him. When didst thou see him last?"

Zoraya hesitated. She did not like his expression.

Ali Moudara smiled sarcastically.

"Thou fearest for him perhaps. Thou doest well. I will make him wish he had never been born."

Then Zoraya was stung to fresh anger, for no girl likes to hear her lover threatened even by his living image and double.

"Thou hadst best be wary," she answered with a haughty toss of her long hair. "I have seen him scatter Aben Amar's men like sheep, and he would never have run from all the robbers in this valley. Why he would slay thee like a chicken."

Ali Moudara's eyes glittered in the moonlight and his teeth were clinched for several seconds, ere he mastered himself enough to reply:

"It is well. He is on this road, I suppose."

"Nay, as for that I cannot say," retorted Zoraya carelessly. "He was with Mousa and me at the great castle down the valley, when he heard of thee, and set off to seek thee. I warrant he'll make thee repent taking his name to cheat that light damsel, Panchita, who is dying for love of him and yet is scorned by him."

The knight's voice shook with anger as he gave her back all the sarcasm he could muster.

"My Panchita is an angel of purity stolen from her home, whither I am to take her back. She did not leave it willfully to follow a man of strange religion."

"And my Gonzalo will take me to his own home, without cheating me into the belief that he is another man. Our eyes are open, but your Panchita despises Ali Moudara as much as I do."

When a man tries to bandy words with a girl he generally gets the worst of it, and so Ali Moudara found in their brief encounter. The taunts of the girl had already cost him courtesy and temper, and he could not irritate her out of her smooth smile.

Smothering a curse under his breath he turned away his horse with the gruff farewell:

"May we both find what we seek. I cannot escort a black boy about the country but I can kill the man that has stolen the Caliph's daughter."

Determined to have the last word, she called out after him:

"Fare thee well, Ali Moudara. I will tell my Gonzalo, when I meet him, how the robbers made thee run."

The angry knight dashed his spurs into his horse with a savage vindictiveness that told how the taunt had struck home, and darted away toward the mountains whence he had come only a few hours before, chasing through the darkness the white *harick* or Moorish cloak

of the disguised princess, which he had mistaken for the veil of Panchita.

Zoraya, thus left to herself, at first laughed triumphantly at the flight of the discomfited knight, then stopped with a choke and began to weep bitterly, and finally sobbed herself almost into hysterics.

The reaction of fear and shame had set in as she found herself alone in the moonlight, in the degrading disguise of a boy slave, to be beaten and cuffed by any one who chose to do so. The sting of Ali Moudara's blows, albeit unwittingly given to her, seemed to scorch her cheeks like fire, even yet, and she began to feel the pangs of fear at her loneliness.

"Why did I ever leave Al Zobra, and where shall I go now?" she groaned to herself. "Where has old Mousa gone? Oh, if ever I find him I will never leave his side again till I am safe in Medina Al Zobra. Why did Gonzalo desert me in this heartless manner, and where has he gone to?"

The moon had now risen so high that Zoraya could look about her and see the country for a good distance on all sides. She had passed out of the valley where the robbers had their camp, and knew from the speed of her horse that she must be at least twenty miles, if not thirty, from the Wizard's Castle.

She had in fact reached the top of the main range of the Sierra Guadalupe and had halted on the divide looking on one side down the plains of Toledo, and on the other into the table lands of Castile. It was on the latter side that was visible the little twinkling light that shone from the turret window of a distant castle, rising gray and ghostly in the moonlight, and something seemed to impel the wandering princess to approach that light, which was at least ten miles away.

Not caring to pick up her negro's wig, bitterly ashamed of her boy's disguise, trying to concoct some tale to account for her singular appearance, Zoraya turned the head of her swift and patient steed toward the distant light and rode toward it.

Ere very long, as she rode, she became sensible that another traveler on a white horse, and likewise dressed in white, was some miles ahead of her, going toward the castle, and she whipped up her horse, saying to herself in tones of great relief:

"That must be himself at last. I am safe after all. Now, Ali Moudara, look to thyself when I have told him."

She rapidly overtook the distant traveler, who frequently halted as if to look round him, and in one of these pauses Zoraya waved her white cloak in such a way as to attract attention, when to her delight the white figure paused and came rapidly back.

"It is he after all, praise Allah!" cried the girl, gleefully; and then she galloped on faster than before till she and the new-comer were together.

Then came two exclamations of wonder and alarm:

"Panchita! Thou here!"

"Zoraya! Here!"

CHAPTER XIX.

DISTRESSED DAMSELS.

How came Panchita out in the night alone, and how came she, where she was, to meet Zoraya? To answer this it is necessary to go back to her when she fled so wildly from Pepito's care into the mountain gorges.

When the brigands first confronted Ali Moudara (for the reader can no longer doubt who was Panchita's knight), the girl had been terrified half to death, for she was not made of the same stuff as Zoraya. It was in sheer blind fear that she had fled so fast, and her horse, catching the infection of her terror, had finally run away with her, carrying her up the pass and into a labyrinth of ravines and gullies, till he paused at last, blown and exhausted for the time, in a deep ravine, sloping downward to the table-lands of Castile, a fact Panchita recognized as soon as she recovered her coolness.

All was silent around her. How far she had come in her wild race she knew not; though she realized that her horse was fleet and enduring enough to have taken her at least half a day's journey of the common heavy horses of Castile.

All that she felt sure of was that Castile and home lay somewhere in the direction she was going; and as soon as her steed had recovered his breath she rode on in the only direction

open to her. She could see that the ravine sloped down to a broad valley, which in its turn merged into a vast desolate plain, and far away in the distance shone a solitary light which told of some human habitation.

"And whatever it be, it must be Christian," quoth Panchita to herself; "therefore I will trust it, and wait there until Gonzalo comes to find me, as a true knight should."

The girl had no fears but what her lover would come back to seek her and would find her, no matter where she went. She had been bred up in the atmosphere of chivalry, which accounted nothing impossible to a knight in the cause of his lady.

Therefore, she rode boldly on down the ravine into the broad valley, and thence out on the desolate plain, the rising moon coming at last to cheer her with its welcome light.

Panchita was by no means devoid of fear as she rode on. The utter loneliness of everything round her, the wild desolation of the prospect, so different from the rich plains of Moorish Toledo, inspired her with awe, and she started in nervous terror every time that a hare scudded across the heath, disturbed at his midnight feast by the footfalls of her horse.

Finally she came near enough to the light to see that it proceeded from the upper window of a great white building that had the appearance of a castle, or of one of those fortress-like convents then common in Spain, wherein the holy monks and nuns found refuge from the insults of wild raiding parties, whether Moors or Christians.

Now that the girl felt a little more at her ease in the prospect of a shelter, she began to look round her more attentively, and could see no signs whatever of cultivation. She was, in fact, on those great table-lands of Central Spain where nothing grows but grass and heath, and where the shepherd supplants the husbandman. Save the great white building in the distance, there was no sign of human habitation; not so much as a mud hovel, as far as Panchita could discover.

Now she began to halt at intervals and look back, in the hope of seeing the knight whom she persisted in calling Don Gonzalo, for Panchita had a feminine way of insisting that her lover ought to know everything she did, including the finding of her track in the dark. She did not know that he had left Pepito to do this, while he returned to the valley with the object of intercepting her probable path north into Castile, judging, with the experience of a Moorish warrior, that such would be her ultimate direction.

Panchita halted, turned her horse, and looked earnestly back, but saw nothing. With a sigh she rode on again toward the light, only to stop afresh in a little while.

Repeating these maneuvers several times, she was at last gratified by the sight of something white coming rapidly over the plain from the south-west.

"He has found me at last," ejaculated the girl gleefully, and then she saw the waving of a white cloak, which she took for a signal to her to stop.

Without more hesitation, but wondering somewhat as to the absence of the squire (for she could only see one figure), she rode back, to be confronted, to her intense amazement, by a black boy, with a woman's hair, and the voice of Zoraya, who called out to her:

"Panchita! Thou here!"

The voice was full of angry question, as if the owner were excited and disappointed; and all poor Panchita could falter out was:

"Zoraya! Here!"

"Yes, Zoraya, here!" cried the strange being, indignantly. "Dost thou think that I would let thee roam the country, trying to steal away my knight from me, and not follow thee to the death?"

Zoraya was by no means as much amazed as Panchita, but much more angry, both from disposition and provocation. She had known from Ali Moudara that Panchita was somewhere near, whereas the Christian girl was utterly ignorant of the vicinity of Zoraya till she recognized her by her voice.

The question about her knight, however, nettled her; for Panchita was not entirely devoid of spirit, as we have seen, and she retorted:

"It was not I who stole him, Zoraya. He followed me."

"And thou thinkest, doubtless, that he is Don Gonzalo Gonzales?" asked Zoraya, sneeringly.

"I think that he is, unless all men are liars," answered Panchita.

"'Tis true he denied his name awhile, and said that he was one Ali Moudara, (under thy spells, Zoraya); but he came to me only yesterday and admitted that he was his true self, Gonzalo Gonzales, son of the Count of Lara. His squire was with him and confirmed it."

Zoraya laughed sarcastically.

"A pretty tale indeed! Here hast thou been wandering the country alone with the Moorish cavalier, Ali Moudara, whom we all thought to be in Africa, and he has blinded the scruples of my delicate lady by pretending that he is Don Gonzalo Gonzales. And I dare swear he pretends to love thee, this vain and overbearing champion, who takes the lofty title of Lion of the Rock."

Panchita flushed crimson, but made shift to answer bravely:

"My knight loves me, and has proved it by respecting me."

"By deceiving thee, rather. Dost thou pretend he is a Christian?"

Panchita's voice trembled.

"Why not?"

"Has he ever told thee so?"

The girl hesitated a moment, and then answered slowly:

"Not directly. But he has answered when I called him Gonzalo."

"Called him Gonzalo? of course. He must be a dull fool that would not lie to please a lady. My knight is the true Gonzalo; but he bears the name I gave him, Ali Moudara, before all the world, because I ordered him; though we both know the true Ali Moudara is another."

Poor Panchita listened with a rueful face, and faltered out:

"Do I then love a miscreant Moor? Oh Zoraya, I thought—"

"I know—thou thoughtst—that is it. And didst thou think that a man honored by the love of the Star of Cordova would turn away to a pale puny thing like thee?"

Zoraya's voice had a tone of angry scorn as she made the demand, and she laid her hand threateningly on the little scimitar she still wore. The hot southern blood of Arabia was all aflame with anger, and the pale Gothic Panchita quailed before her electric passion.

"Mercy, Zoraya, mercy!" she pleaded. "I did not know it indeed. I never sought him. I was going to the mountains with Pepito when I met him, and I thought 'twas—the other."

"And dost thou dare to say thou still lovest Gonzalo Gonzales?" asked the Morisco girl in the same tone of menacing import.

"No, no. I love him—my knight—whoever he be, Zoraya. Oh, would to the Holy Saints he were here now!"

"He is vainly scouring the mountains after his Panchita," retorted Zoraya in her bitterest tones; "and ere he comes back he will find my Gonzalo, who will strip the hide off this Lion of the Rock ere he can bless his sweet lady."

Panchita looked at her a moment in amazement and terror.

"Are there indeed two of them, and will they kill each other?" she asked in a low voice.

"No. My knight will kill *thine*: that is all," answered Zoraya, sharply.

Then Panchita burst into tears at last and sobbed out:

"Oh, Zoraya, is it possible? How cruel thou hast grown! I would not see a hair of thy knight's head harmed, because of his likeness to mine. Who knows what they may be?"

Zoraya's face softened at once, for she was generous and forgiving to any person who did not oppose her to the end.

"Nay, nay, it may not be as bad as that," she admitted. "Ali Moudara is said to be a good warrior; and were he not so puffed up with pride, I might have loved him myself; but it will be a hard battle, I doubt nothing. He is a proud, naughty, cruel and ill-mannered knight, and a little blood-letting will do him no harm."

"Why, Zoraya," cried Panchita in the utmost amazement, "he is humility itself and the soul of courtesy to me. Why should we quarrel, my sister? for sisters in misfortune we are. We both love noble knights, and they hate each other for no cause, but that one is like the other. They may be brothers, Zoraya?"

The disguised princess was softened again, for all her ill-humor could not withstand the gentle persuasion of Panchita.

"It is true," she admitted, "there is no reason we should hate each other, for we do not love the same man. But how can they be brothers, when one is a Moor and the other is son to the Count of Lara?"

"That I cannot tell," replied Panchita, musingly, "but this I know, that two men so marvelously alike in form and feature must needs be akin in blood. Whom say they is this Ali Moudara, who hath deceived us both?"

"Not both; I never was deceived in him, after once I saw him."

"Well, sister, say who has deceived poor me, all alone. Who is he?"

"Men called him the son of Al Mansour, in Cordova," replied Zoraya in the same thoughtful tone as Panchita.

"But stay—no—I have it. I have heard Mousa say that he was only adopted by the Vizier, and was really stolen on some raid from the Christians."

Panchita clapped her hands.

"I knew it! My gallant knight was born a Christian, and I shall yet bring him back to the faith of his fathers, while thou, my sister, will wed the noble Count of Lara and embrace our holy religion. Oh, how happy we shall be, then; and how we will love each other, my sister!"

The little maiden's face was all aglow with enthusiasm, which was rather chilled by Zoraya's answer.

"I have a better plan. Ali Moudara, proud peacock though he be, is a true believer, and shall convert thee, while I will win my Gonzalo from the idolatrous worship of his images, and we will all embrace the only true faith. There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet."

Panchita fixed her mild, dove-like eyes on Zoraya pleadingly.

"Nay, sister, it is not possible that thou canst truly believe in the wretched impostor of Mecca, who denieth woman her place in heaven, and canst look coldly on our Holy Mother Church, where a woman is the Queen of Heaven itself."

Zoraya was tempted to reply with a mocking sneer, but the mild face of Panchita disarmed her, and she threw her arms round her neck instead and embraced her heartily, as she said:

"Thy religion is better than mine, in that it has made thee so gentle. Panchita, I will go with thee where thou wilt, even to yonder Christian castle, for, by my father's life, I am weary of this black masquerade, and would be a woman once more. Wilt thou vouch for me, my sister in distress?"

"Willingly," cried the placable and now delighted Panchita. "Thou wast kind to the lonely prisoner, and now she shall repay thee. Let us ride on, my sister."

The lately angry but now fast reconciled girls turned their horses toward the white building without more ado, and began to exchange confidences on the way as to their previous adventures and how they had come there.

Zoraya told with great glee how she had brought away Gonzalo and Pepito from the prison, hidden them in the harem under the very nose of her father, and sent Pepito off to the market to procure the dress of a black slave for Don Gonzalo, since which the squire had not been heard of. This made a change in her plans necessary, as it had been her intention to have gone off in the guise of three slaves together, in charge of old Mousa, as a present to the Governor of Toledo.

Fearing that Pepito might reveal their plans and hiding-place under torture, the princess had hastily sallied out with her lover, still in the guise of Ali Moudara.

Aided by the arrest of the true Ali, his false impersonator had been able to traverse the country on the public post horses, which the Moors first introduced in Europe, just in advance of the kiaschefs, all the way to the border castle of Ali Moudara, near the pass of the Almagavars.

"The very place he wanted to take me to see," interjected Panchita at this point.

"Yes," continued Zoraya; "and there we were received by the vassals of Al Mansour and allowed to select what we pleased from stable and armory, when Gonzalo took the whim of arming himself all in white, in the only suit of Christian armor in the castle."

"Not the only one," persisted Panchita, "for my knight wore Christian armor, or I should not have let him come nigh me."

"But we were all in white or light gray, horses, armor, cloaks and all," said Zoraya.

"So were we."

"There is something strange in all this," protested Zoraya, "and we can never know how it came to pass till we meet them face to face. Now I remember—the servants brought out the armor with great ceremony, and called it the 'King's Gift.' But what is all that to us? Here we are by the castle. How shall we obtain entrance in this, your Christian land?"

The wandering ladies were in fact under the walls of the white building they had seen, and it was more than two hours past midnight.

The building was all blank and silent, save for the one ray of light shining from a slit in the top of one of the tall turrets at the angles.

The whole edifice was rude and massive, with a projecting gallery all round the summit, called in France the *hourdes*, and pierced with holes in the bottom, for the amiable purpose of pouring boiling oil, quicklime or melted lead on the heads of any impertinent persons approaching the walls without proper permission.

"It is a castle, Zoraya," explained Panchita. "That light is the candle of the watchman in the turret, who looks out over the landscape to spy Moorish raiders. If he sees any, he lights the beacon on the roof at once, to warn the border that the Infidels are coming."

"I would he would see us two," retorted Zoraya, impatiently. "Are we to wait here all night, and how shall we wake him up?"

As if in answer to the wish, a hoarse voice shouted from the top of the turret:

"Who are ye, down there?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE LONELY CASTLE.

"WE are two distressed damsels escaped from the power of the Infidels, and we crave protection and shelter," cried Panchita as loud as she could. "Will you not let us in, good friend?"

No answer came at first, and the girl was obliged to repeat her plea before the watchman called down:

"Can ye not wait till I rouse the castle and send word to my master? By my faith, ye are too impatient for people who have been out so long in the moonlight."

Thus adjured, the two girls were fain to remain sitting on their horses before the gate of the white castle, standing all alone, like a sentry over the desolate plains of Castile. For a long time they heard no sound inside, and they were beginning to doubt if the watchman had not deceived them, when they were startled by a voice just over their heads, and saw a light gleaming from a loophole at one side of the gate-towers.

"Who are ye, and what brings ye here alone and unattended?" asked this voice, in tones of peevish ill-temper. "We are too well used to Infidel tricks to be deceived, and the watchman hath his arbalist ready to shoot ye both if ye lie."

"Indeed, sir, we do not lie," answered Panchita, earnestly. "I am Dona Francesca Ximenes, daughter of the Prince of the Asturias, stolen from my home for the Maiden Tribute to Cordova, and escaped thence by the assistance of this damsel, my fellow-prisoner. Whose castle is this, I pray you, good sir?"

"This is the castle of the Most Noble Don Gonzalo Garcia, Count of Lara and Patron of Calatrava," was the answer, in tones of less severity. "We have heard of the capture of the Lady Panchita, and if thou be she, indeed thou art welcome. Who is the other? 'Tis a black boy in this light."

"'Tis a damsel—a friend of mine that took that disguise to help me," replied Panchita, a little timidly, while Zoraya, whose giddy humor seemed to be returning, now she was out of harm, whispered:

"Tell him we came with the son of their house, silly one. Knowest thou not this is the castle of thy knight's father? Now shall we see how he lives at home."

"You forget. My knight is not the son of this house," answered Panchita, in the same tone. "It is thine."

But they were interrupted by the voice from the loophole, whence a pair of sharp eyes were evidently watching them:

"What whisper ye about? Is it a plot ye are hatching? Who is thy companion, thou who claimest to be Dona Panchita?"

"A damsel who has escaped with me as I told thee," replied the girl abashed.

"What is her name?"

"Zoraya."

"Indeed. A Morisco then? Would she turn Christian at once? We have a holy chaplain in the castle."

Here Zoraya interposed in her light mocking way.

"Concern not thyself, good friend, as to my religion. If I turn Christian it will not be for a chaplain. Tell your master we have seen his son abroad and bring him news of Don Gonzalo. Perhaps that will make him hurry for we are half frozen out in this cold night air."

Immediately the girl spoke the light disappeared from the loophole and the cross voice became as amiable as that of a dove.

"I will open the gate at once. Enter in the name of heaven if ye bring us news of our young lord. The count and countess will receive ye with joy."

Zoraya laughed to Panchita, as she heard the rattle of chains within, that told of the preparations.

"We should never have got in all night if we had kept to mild words," she observed. "That suspicious old warder seemed to think us dangerous persons to be kept out of his castle. As if we could have hurt it."

"Nay, sister," replied Panchita, jealous for the honor of her country which Zoraya seemed disposed to sneer at. "It is necessary to be cautious in time of war, and it is past midnight. We cannot blame this warder."

Further discussion was stopped by the dull boom of the falling drawbridge and they saw before them the dark arch of the gateway with a dozen armed men in an outer court, the light of torches held by two of them illuminating the white hair of an old man who stood bowing at their head.

The two girls, without more ado, rode over the bridge and found themselves in the outer court of the castle of Lara, surrounded by lofty ramparts, to which access was had by narrow flights of stone steps, built along the inner face of the ramparts.

The old man bowed obsequiously before the girls as they entered, and said:

"Let the noble ladies dismount. We will see to their beasts. My lord the count and my lady the countess will see the noble ladies in their own chamber at once for we are all wearying for news of our young knight, Don Gonzalo."

Zoraya in spite of her naturally bold and impetuous disposition, could not help feeling a certain amount of confusion as she noted the curious gaze with which the retainers of Lara regarded her. In truth with her boy's dress, blackened skin, Moorish *haick*, scimitar and long, flowing hair she made a sufficiently singular and incongruous figure. Panchita in the ordinary garments of a Christian lady attracted no attention, but even the old seneschal could not help staring at the princess in undisguised curiosity though he soon averted his gaze and remembered his manners.

They were ushered respectfully into the castle hall, which was all dark and silent, the fire smoldering in a heap of embers, and thence down a succession of dark corridors to the chamber of the lord and lady, where the seneschal tapped at the door and was greeted with an invitation to enter.

Then Zoraya, her heart beating strangely, was ushered into the room and stood in the presence of the parents of him she loved and had served so well.

The Count of Lara was a very old and infirm man, wrapped in the long, furred gown of a knight, and was seated in a great chair by a blazing wood fire, which lighted the room so much as to make lamps unnecessary.

The old countess Sancha, her head as white as that of her husband, was ensconced in another chair on the opposite side of the fire, and the old couple had evidently been roused from their slumbers and were waiting in some agitation the report of their retainers as to the intruders.

"Well, Manuel, who are they?" asked the old knight in a quavering voice. "Are they true ladies, or spies of the Moor come to find out our condition?"

"The ladies are maidens escaped from the Moor, and one of them saith she hath seen our young lord," answered the seneschal.

The Countess Sancha uttered a faint cry of wonder and bent forward in her chair.

"Which one has seen my son; which one?" she asked in her trembling voice.

"This one, my lady." And the seneschal pointed to Zoraya who stood uneasily fingering the handle of her little saber.

"But that is a boy," ejaculated the old count, peevishly. "Thou saidst there were two ladies, Manuel."

"Nay, my lord," interposed Panchita in her sweet tones, stepping in front of Zoraya as she spoke, "I will dare swear that I at least am no boy, and I can vouch that beneath this disguise beats the heart of as proud a lady as any in Castile. I am Francesca de Ximenes—"

"What! the daughter of my old friend Don Ximenes, stolen away by the Moors?" cried the old count. "Why, lady, thy father's people have been hunting all Castile and Leon to find thee, and Don Ramiro Diaz left here only this morning to go to the convent of St. Ursula whence came a message purporting to be from thee. How comest thou abroad alone in the night, and here too?"

It was Panchita's turn to be confused now and she stammered:

"I came with a knight who told me—"

Here she stopped for she felt too much embarrassed to explain how she had been deceived, and the old countess broke in:

"Who was it? My son?"

"I—I thought it was—he said it was—but I have since found out that—it was another."

While Panchita was stammering her disconnected explanations Zoraya had been hardening herself into a portion of her old courage and now impatiently broke in on the discourse.

"Let us tell the whole truth, my sister, and puzzle the good count no longer. Senor Christian, I am the Princess Zoraya, daughter of the Successor of the Prephet. I came to Castile with Aben Amar to bring back the Maiden Tribute to my father. This lady was with the rest. No Moors stole her, but your own pious Christian king of Leon. We met your son, Don Gonzalo, at the Pass of the Almogavars, and he had the audacity to kill Aben Amar, scatter the Moorish guard and pretend to release the Maiden Tribute."

The old count rose up, trembling with excitement.

"My brave boy! He is worthy of the blood of Lara! Go on! Go on!"

Zoraya smiled mockingly.

"He is indeed as full of the follies of chivalry as you could wish, but he found to his surprise that the maidens did not wish to be taken back to the barren rocks of Castile after I had told them of the rose gardens of Cordova. Then he saw me, senor; and was pleased to fall at my feet and swear that he loved me."

The old count surveyed her with incredulous amazement.

"Loved thee! My son kneel to a black, be it boy or girl!"

Zoraya laughed in her most mocking tones as she retorted:

"Does a black horse please thee less than a white one, if he be shaped as well and run as fast? But I am not all black, most noble lord. See!"

She threw back her sleeves to the shoulder, and showed how she was only dyed to the elbow.

"My skin is as white as thine, as thou shalt see in the morning when I have cleaned me of this dye. Black or white, I took thy son to be my knight, and he hath sworn allegiance to me."

"But how came ye hither? Be brief, in charity, good friend, whether black or white, boy or girl," cried the old count, peevishly.

"Simple enough, my lord. I made Don Gonzalo assume the name of Ali Moudara, the son of Al Mansour, knowing that chief to be like him in face and figure, and inasmuch as Ali Moudara was absent in Africa. The young cavalier was willing and he took us to Toledo, whence this lady fled to Castile alone. I, thinking he had assisted her escape, bade him show his faith to me by finding her and bringing her back to me."

"Oho!" chuckled the old countess, who had been listening attentively. "My little boy was jealous. So the love was not all on one side. My boy is a handsome knight forsooth."

Again Zoraya laughed and hardened herself to answer:

"We Morisco maidens are foolish enough to give love for love, lady. We do not believe in the Christian fashions of proud ladies who set their knights impossible tasks for their own

vanity. I sent Don Gonzalo away to prove his faith, but the spies of Al Mansour detected his disguise, carried him to Cordova, and the Vizier ordered his immediate execution."

Now count and countess started up together with the agonized cry:

"What! is he dead?"

"Nay, nay, or I should not be here," answered Zoraya, gravely. "I myself, hearing of his imprisonment, left my father's palace, where dozens of slaves await my every whim, hid myself beneath this disguise and aided him to escape. What is my reward, you Christian father and mother? He I had lost all to save left me without one word, with my old black slave Mousa, alone in the castle of Ruy Velasquez."

She was interrupted again, this time by the countess, who uttered a cry as if some one had struck her.

"Not there, not there, sweet princess! Say not that my son willingly left thee in the Wizard's Castle."

"Assuredly he did, lady, and I like a fool followed him while he was chasing the night after a Will o' the Wisp whom I take to be Ali Moudara himself searching for him. While I was hunting Gonzalo I met Ali, and we quarreled, after which I found this wandering damsel, hunting Ali and thinking him Gonzalo and we came here together."

"And dost thou say that my son entered the Wizard's Castle?" asked the old count in a low tone as Zoraya paused in her story. "Where then was Pepito?"

"In Cordova, a prisoner."

"Nay, sister, for he was with me not three hours before I met thee in the valley," interposed the wondering Panchita. "He and his master escaped from Cordova and came to the convent yesterday to carry me to my father."

"Whom meanest thou by 'his master,' lady?" asked the Count of Lara.

"Nay, my lord, I thought he was Don Gonzalo; he answered to that name; and his squire was the same man that always rode with Don Gonzalo. The Count and Countess Velasquez saw him in the convent and seemed as if they feared him greatly, for they stared at him as he had been a specter."

"And when they saw my Gonzalo," interposed Zoraya, "they looked as they would faint away, so much that the count asked him if he were indeed a phantom."

The Count of Lara looked at his wife with a glance full of meaning.

"They had reason, my children. But how is this? You say there are two knights, alike in every feature, and yet—"

"One is your son: the other is the son of Al Mansour," put in the princess promptly.

The old count seemed to be much disturbed in his mind, for he paced the room, muttering to himself for some minutes during which the Countess Sancha remained staring blankly at her guests.

At last the old man turned to the newcomers.

"Pardon me if I have seemed to be lacking in courtesy, but this news has moved me much, and I must have time to think over it. Manuel, call the women up and let these noble ladies be taken to the guest-chamber in the south front of the castle and entertained as becomes their rank. In the morning I will see them further when we break our fast in the hall, and in the mean time may your slumbers be sweet."

The lord of the castle bowed in his most courteous style as he finished, and the old countess embraced the girls affectionately and dismissed them to the care of her women who were already roused up for the purpose.

As soon as the guests had left the room, Count Gonzalo of Lara turned to his wife and said in a low voice full of awe.

"What means all this, Sancha? Has the witch Lambra enchanted another into the likeness of our only son that she may destroy him as she destroyed his brethren? It is not possible there can be another living man on earth like our Gonzalo."

Countess Sancha did not answer for some time. She seemed penetrated with the most lively grief.

"Oh, my lord," she said at last, "when I think that all this woe has come to Lara through my wicked brother, I feel unworthy to live."

"Nay, sweetheart," answered the old knight, affectionately stroking her white hair, "if Ray has brought harm to Lara, Sancha has

been its good angel. We have one noble son left at least—"

"And who knows how long he will be spared to us?" interrupted his wife in the same tone of querulous grief.

"Never had woman nobler sons than mine, and seven have gone down under the scimitar of the Moor, not slain in battle—for I could have borne that—but betrayed to death by the witchcraft of the wicked Lambra and my brother—alas that I say it!"

"Sancha," said the old knight solemnly, "our sons are in glory, and he who remains is winning glory for himself. Thinkest thou I have forgotten the past? Not so. But now comes the question, who is this strange knight, said to be the son of Al Mansour, and yet so like our boy that he hath deceived Pepito himself into following him? Who can he be?"

The old countess raised her hands and eyes to heaven, ejaculating:

"Holy Mother grant my prayer, that I may see them both ere I die, for I alone can solve the mystery, and not even I till I see them."

"What mean'st thou?" asked the Count of Lara anxiously.

"My lord will see when they are both here and not before," was the enigmatic answer of Sancha.

CHAPTER XXI. THE STRANGE KNIGHT.

Hot and scorching rose the sun next morning over the desolate plains of Castile, for it was the middle of summer, and not a cloud dimmed the sky. The wild heath all round the castle of Lara was dotted with flocks of sheep, which had been penned all night under the shadow of the walls for protection from robbers and now roamed abroad, the sole wealth of the once powerful and rich Count of Lara.

The two girls, exhausted with their vigils of the previous night, did not waken till the blazing rays of the sun penetrated their chamber in the southern face of the castle; and then Zoraya looked forth on the desolate scene, and gayly cried out to Panchita:

"Up, sister, and look out. One might think we were in Africa rather than Spain, and that this was the great waste of Sabara. By my faith, I have a mind to leave Gonzalo to thee, if this is all his heritage, and go back to Cordova with Ali Moudara, haughty and ill-mannered though he be."

Panchita smiled at the other's mocking mood as she answered:

"'Tis because the scene is new that it looks desolate to thee. See it in the springtime, when the purple heath is in bloom, and the bees are humming among the wild flowers by millions; or in autumn, when the yellow gorse shines like fields of gold; and our wild tablelands have a charm sweeter than all the palms and orange groves of Cordova or Seville. But now it is the hot season, and we shall have a hot day, sister. But let us dress. It is time we waited on the good Count and Countess of Lara. How strange we should have seen them thus!"

"Nay, thou mayst see them, but I cannot for very shame, in broad daylight, and in this garb," replied Zoraya.

"Thou needst not. I told the women of the countess last night who thou wert, and one of them promised to bring us the dress of the Moorish lady, Ayesha, with a store of alkali to take off the stain of the dye."

"The Moorish lady, Ayesha! Who is she, Panchita?"

"'Tis a sad story the woman told me. When the old count was a prisoner in Cordova, years ago, Al Mansour released him and sent him home, after his seven sons had been slain under one of the spells of the witch, Lambra, that thou sawest in the castle of Ruy Velasquez. And this Moorish lady was so touched with the noble patience and courage of the poor knight—who was then in the prime of life—that she fled from Cordova and sought him in this castle, not knowing that his wife was alive, but in pure love."

"She was a fool," observed Zoraya, bitterly; "as much a fool as I am. He despised her for her love of course."

"Not so, Zoraya. Hear all. She was welcomed both by him and the good countess, and became their honored guest and friend."

"But where, then, is the sad story of which the woman spoke?"

"That came with the Moors, as of old time. Al Mansour made a great raid to the shrine of St. Iago at Compostella, and the count went

forth to the battle with his vassals to help Don Garcia Fernandez, Count of Castile. They found the beautiful dresses of the Lady Ayesha in her room after he had gone, but the lady had disappeared, and was afterward found dead, in the disguise of a boy, on the great battle-field of the Tormes, where fell King Bermudo, of Leon. Then they first knew that she loved the knight."

"Ay," said Zoraya, in a sad, musing tone. "They found it when too late, for the other woman was happy."

"Nay; the countess had her sorrows too; for the Moors raided all the country round this castle, and even surprised the place itself, from which they were not expelled till after a terrible battle, the Count of Lara returning even while the robbers were setting fire to the castle."

"And where was the countess?"

"Sick in her bed, and many thought she would die, for on that very day Gonzalo Gonzales was born."

"A fit time for the birth of such a warrior," said the Moorish princess, proudly. "He is indeed a knight from the cradle."

"He was nearly carried off by the Moors as it was, so the woman says," replied Panchita.

"They had penetrated into the very room where the countess lay, when the count rode in at the gates, took them in the rear by surprise, and drove them forth."

She was interrupted by the arrival of the women, by whose assistance Zoraya's skin was soon restored to its natural color, after which she resumed the habiliments of her sex and nation, with much satisfaction to herself and Panchita.

"Now thou art indeed the Star of Cordova!" exclaimed the Christian maiden, delightedly. "I wonder not now that Gonzalo followed thee like a slave, for thou art worthy of the noblest knight in the world."

Zoraya smiled, well pleased, for the rough usage she had experienced the previous night had rendered her sensitive, and the voice of flattery was sweet.

They found the old count and countess in the great hall, in the patriarchal mediæval fashion, sitting at the head of the long table, at which gathered all their retainers. The line of division between family and vassals was marked by the huge silver basin of salt which stood on the table, so that family and guests were "above" and all the rest "below" the salt; a form of language that survives to the present day in places whence the custom has long vanished.

The ladies were received with the most distinguished courtesy by the knight, who apologized for the rude and bare appearance of the castle and the plain dress of his vassals by saying to Zoraya:

"Time was, most gracious princess, when Lara was as rich as any lord of Spain; but, thanks to the warlike abilities of your great Vizier, Al Mansour, I have not left to me much more than the sheep on the heath without. I pray the princess to excuse our little omissions therefore."

On the previous night the old count had made much of Panchita; but now that Zoraya's disfiguring disguise was removed, and that she was appareled as became her rank, the luster of her rich beauty was so overpowering that a low hum of admiration greeted her as she entered the hall.

She smiled as she answered the count:

"My lord has nothing to excuse. I would, for my part, that these cruel wars were gone forever; for I fear my lord must look on me, who am a Moor, with little love."

"Nay, lady, I never blamed an open foe like the great Al Mansour and his warriors. God knows, were it not for the bounty of the Moor, I might to-day be a fugitive outcast. It was Al Mansour who gave me freedom after I was betrayed into his hands by my own kinsfolk; and though the Moorish sword slew my seven gallant sons, 'twas a Christian hand forged the order for their death. Gracious princess, be happy beneath my roof if thou canst, for Lara owes thee and thine naught but love now."

The old count's face was marked by various contending emotions as he spoke, but he ended quite cheerfully as he led his fair guests to the table; and the repast went on without further comment.

It was after breakfast, and while the old couple were questioning their guests further as to their adventures of the previous day, that a confusion became audible outside the hall in

the castle court. Shouts and cries were heard, as if men were calling to each other; and presently the old seneschal came hurriedly into the hall in great excitement, ran up to his lord and ejaculated:

"Oh my, lord, my lord! A knight is coming toward the castle; and the men say it is my young lord, Don Gonzalo!"

Up started count and countess, Panchita and Zoraya, in great emotion, and hurried into the court-yard, where they found the bridge down, the gate open, and the whole population of the castle upon the ramparts or out on the glacis, waving their hands and hats in welcome to a single horseman, who was rapidly approaching the castle, all in white armor, and mounted on a white horse of slender build, with flowing mane and tail.

This knight rode at a gallop as if in a great hurry, and his course seemed to lie directly toward the castle. The nearer he came, the plainer were face and figure; and the keen-sighted shepherds and herdsmen of Lara unhesitatingly pronounced it to be their young master, albeit he had left home in much more sorry guise than he now returned.

As soon as he was within sound of their voices, they began to shout and wave their caps, expecting to see him ride in at the gate; but to their surprise he took no notice whatever of their salutations.

Presently he was abreast of the castle-gate, and glanced up at the huge white pile of building with a look as if tempted to draw rein; but a second thought seemed to prevail over him, for he dashed his spurs into his charger and galloped on, faster than ever, over the dusty plain, heedless of the group at the gates and on the walls, vanishing from view in a yellow cloud and going toward the distant mountains of the Sierra Guadalupe.

The keen-sighted watchman on the ramparts above presently called down to the count that the strange knight had stopped and was talking to a shepherd, but they could not see anything from the plain below, and the disappointed retainers returned to the castle, whispering all sorts of rumors and conjectures to each other, while the Count of Lara and his guests were much abashed and discouraged at the incident.

Panchita remained with her hosts to suggest crumbs of comfort to them for the girl felt sure that this uncivil knight could be no other than Ali Moudara.

Zoraya, however, more enterprising in her nature, was not satisfied to remain in the hall. The damsel was determined to find out the mystery; and accordingly she mounted the ramparts, all alone, and went to the watchtower, where she found a stout, bronzed peasant, scanning the country below very intently.

Zoraya looked abroad herself, but could see nothing of the knight.

A bare desolate plain, dotted with sheep, a few little pools of water, a distant horizon of mountains; that was all.

The watchman regarded her with bashful admiration as she asked him:

"What seest thou of thy young master, watchman?"

"He is yonder, my lady," replied the man, pointing out over the plain.

"Where? I see nothing."

"Can my lady notice that little moving puff of dust going toward the valley of the Chico? There, by the furthest pool. Now it passes. That is the knight that came here. He spoke to the shepherd, and then went off in that direction. Yonder is the shepherd coming to the castle."

Zoraya could not see the dust of which he spoke, but she did see the shepherd coming, and forthwith she hurried down-stairs and into the hall to tell the count.

Very soon the shepherd came in, pale and frightened, to say that he had been accosted by a phantom in broad daylight, and that this phantom bore the likeness of his young master, Don Gonzalo.

"He asked me if any came to the castle last night, and I told him that a lady and a black boy had come there. And then he frowned and grated his teeth at me and asked: 'Where is thy young master? Has he come home?' And when I stared at him, he grew more angry than ever; called me a fool, and cried out: 'Did he come with them?' I told him, as well as I could for trembling, that no one had come but himself, and then he turned his horse and called out: 'I will kill him, if he be yet alive.' So saying, he galloped away, and

I came here to tell my lord that the Devil has put on Don Gonzalo's shape and has sworn to kill Don Gonzalo."

The count and countess listened silently to this story, but Zoraya plucked at Panchita's sleeve and drew her aside, when she whispered:

"Sister, we must away at once. They will kill each other if they meet now. We must follow him."

Panchita started and turned pale. Naturally timid, her nerves had been shaken by the trials and perils of the last few days, and she trembled at the idea of new dangers.

"What can we do, sister?" she faltered.

"We can find them and reconcile them," replied Zoraya determinedly.

"Hitherto we have been separated, and trouble has come of it. Now we are together, and can clear up all this mystery. Come quietly with me. Say nothing to any one; but let us get our horses and ride away after the knight who was here this morning. I suspect he is thine, but there is no telling."

Panchita made no more objection, overborne by the stronger will of her companion. The count and countess were so busy talking to each other in low tones about the affair of the morning that they did not notice the absence of their guests, and the other people of the castle did not dream of disobeying the ladies. Therefore it was not long after the return of the shepherd to the castle that the two maidens rode out over the drawbridge and galloped off on the track of the unknown knight.

The day had grown scorching hot and every step raised clouds of dust, but their horses were of the true desert stamp and heeded not the sun as they swept on, devouring the miles in their speed as if they had been but furlongs.

Zoraya took the direction in which the watchman had pointed from the tower, but they could see nothing of the knight from the plain below, though they rode on for several hours.

The sun was in the zenith when they reached the mountains; which looked, if possible, more bare and desolate than the plains into which they debouched. The grass was all burned up, the streams dwindled to the merest threads of water or altogether dry; and the rocks reflected the glare of the brazen sky till the first valley they entered was like an oven.

Nevertheless, it was in this valley, hardly fit for the existence of anything but a salamander, that they found the first traces of him whom they were seeking, in the shape of the distinct tracks of a horse.

Here also it was that, while they were slowly walking their own animals along, they were greeted by the piteous cry in a man's voice:

"Ladies, beautiful ladies, for the charity of Heaven, stop one moment to succor the unfortunate Babe Moustafa, escaped from the hands of the Almogavars."

Zoraya instantly stopped, though Panchita was disposed, in her timidity, to run away. Presently they saw, coming out of a cleft in the rocks, a man whose tattered garments had once been of the Moorish fashion, though hard usage had almost ruined them. Panchita looked at his face, threw up her hands in amazement, and ejaculated:

"Pepito."

The scarecrow shook his head.

"Not Pepito, lady. Only poor Baba Moustafa, at your service."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ENCHANTED VALLEY.

THE reader has long ago discovered that the cavalier who had announced himself in the Wizard's Castle as the "Haunted Knight," was none other than Don Gonzalo Gonzales. The hot-headed young warrior had no sooner heard that the double who had persecuted him so long was near, than he dashed off, intent on vengeance, leaving his lady in charge of old Mousa, in the halls of one who was, though he little knew it, a deadly foe to his race.

The fact was that the old Count of Lara had been so much overcome by the terrible misfortunes that had befallen his race at the hands of Ruy Velasquez that he had carefully kept the knowledge from his only remaining son, Gonzalo, fearing that the high-spirited youth might strive to avenge his father's wrongs before he was fit to do duty in battle. When the boy graduated into manhood and knight-

hood at once, the count sent him forth with Pepito, who knew the whole story; instructing him to tell it to Gonzalo whenever their adventures should bring them in sight of the Wizard's Castle. As the reader has seen, chance, and the perplexing likeness existing between Ali Moudara and himself, had so far kept Gonzalo in total ignorance of his relations to Ruy Velasquez, while they had aroused in him the most bitter hatred toward Ali Moudara for taking his name, when persuaded by the pleading of Panchita. The knight was not well enough versed in logic to reflect that his own willful assumption of Ali Moudara's name in Toledo, to please Zoraya, had been the original cause of the whole trouble.

Now he rode away from the Wizard's Castle into the night, hearing that his double had been seen in the neighborhood, crazy to find and kill him.

But Gonzalo was not destined to meet Ali Moudara that night, though he rode hard and fast. His acquaintance with the country was the very cause of his missing his enemy and escaping the assassins sent after him by the count. Intent on the idea that the stranger and Panchita had taken the road to Burgos, he failed to follow the valley up which they rode, to fall into the hands of the free lances. He knew that to be a roundabout way, leading by his father's castle, and took a shorter route himself.

The consequence was that the dawn found him at the summit of the main pass leading to Burgos, with an unrestricted view all round him and no signs of his enemy anywhere. Then he realized his mistake and set to work to correct it at once, by striking across the mountains to intercept the other road. He knew that he was at least ahead of his foe.

He stopped and fed his horse from the little store of grain on his saddle as the sun rose; watered the animal at a spring and resumed his journey; the gallant gray barb stepping out with undiminished vigor.

All the long morning he rode, the sun getting hotter and hotter as he entered the dry and barren district of Castile; till he paused, near noon, on some cliffs that overlooked the plains on which stood the old paternal castle of Lara.

Gonzalo looked at it in the dim distance with an uneasy feeling that he could hardly analyze. He longed to go there, and yet felt determined never to do so till he had settled his feud with that other knight who had taken his place. He scanned the plain below him with close attention, and was attracted by two moving white figures, evidently people on horseback going toward the mountains, at a point far distant from himself.

"It is they!" he ejaculated, putting his own horse in motion. "The Count Velasquez says that the man I hate took away a lady. That must be she with him. Would to heaven I had not lost Pepito in Cordova! He could watch one road, while I took another. As it is, I must take my chances."

He took the first valley leading down among the spurs of the range, expecting to find others that would lead him into the plain, and rode rapidly to intercept those distant figures, calculating on their probable course after they should have vanished from his sight. But he had not rightly reckoned on the devious nature of mountain paths, and it was late in the afternoon before he emerged in a broad valley that led into the plain and saw at the end of it, apparently floating in the air, the white masts of towers and walls that marked the Castle of Lara.

Then Gonzalo uttered a cry of awe and wonder. Not a soul was in sight, but the valley before him was trembling and quivering before his eyes with the fantastic whims of the mirage.

Standing above it as he did, it seemed as if a lake was spread out before him, while the distant castle, enlarged into gigantic proportions, was floating in the air, surrounded with sheep feeding on space, and everything, castle included, turned upside down.

The knight had never seen such a thing before, and crossed himself piously as he looked.

"The Evil One is indeed at work," he muttered to himself, "and has done this to balk me of my revenge. This valley never had a lake before. How comes it here now?"

In a little while, however, his courage got the better of his superstition, and he exclaimed:

"So it be water, let the devil make the lake; the Christian shall let his horse drink at its banks."

So saying, he rode down the slope into the valley, and saw to his amazement that the lake receded as he advanced, while the mountains seemed to be rising in the air and hanging over his head.

Now more than ever convinced that this was the work of magic, the fantastic spirit of chivalry came to his aid.

"It is a knight's duty to battle against enchantment," he cried aloud. "Happy fate, that has reserved to Gonzalo the glory of breaking the spells of the Evil One! Forward, and do thy duty!"

As he rode on the heat became more intense, while the illusions of the mirage increased every moment. He began to hear strange muffled rumblings like thunder, which his heated imagination located in the bowels of the earth. The whole prospect was dancing and trembling before his eyes, and a sense of oppression in his head was followed by the wildest visions. He saw strange monsters in the shape of black-horned, four-footed creatures, that bounded from rock to rock, and stared down at him, only to vanish when he approached them, or to change into the likeness of inoffensive goats.

The lake was now replaced by a broad and nobly flowing river, bordered with delicious green groves, above which rose the towers of Lara, now restored to their natural position, but still this river receded as he tried to gain its banks, and dwindled into a tiny thread of water, so small that his horse could not find a place to drink.

On rode the knight, marveling exceedingly, till presently the river seemed to expand into a lake, so large that the further border was lost on the horizon, while the castle entirely disappeared; but Gonzalo forgot all this in a greater and more thrilling excitement.

There, along the margin of the lake, coming toward him, was a horseman of gigantic stature, steed and rider seeming to equal the mountains in their height; and yet, no sooner had he laid eyes on it than he saw himself reflected in every form, feature and particular of dress in the phantom rider.

"At last I have thee, oh mine enemy!" cried the knight, fiercely, and, as if his charger had understood him, it neighed loudly.

Instantly the phantom horse threw up its head and neighed back in tones that echoed from side to side of the enchanted valley like thunder, while the phantom rider brandished his shadowy spear till it seemed to touch the sky above, and cried out, in tones equally loud:

"Impostor and coward! In the name of Allah I defy thee!"

"Impostor thyself! Thy witchcraft is naught, and in our Lady's name have at thee!" shouted Gonzalo, no whit appalled; and then he heard his own voice reverberating like thunder through the valley, and began to have a dim idea of the nature of the illusions that surrounded him.

Hardly had they defied each other, when Gonzalo heard the rumble of unmistakable thunder and saw a dense black cloud forming itself in the brazen sky behind the spectral white stranger, and advancing with marvelous rapidity from the north. He took this as a new species of magical threat, and instantly dashed forward at the Phantom Knight to destroy the enchantment in true chivalric style with the point of his lance.

But the stranger was no less ready for the battle, and bore down on Gonzalo like an elephant on a mouse, as it seemed to the cavalier.

Then ensued the strangest of all phenomena, and one which strengthened Gonzalo's conviction that he was destined to break the spell of enchantment.

With every leap of his horse to meet the phantom the apparition dwindled in size, while the swimming haze that had enveloped him seemed to clear away, the lake shrunk to a tiny pool, the river to a mere thread, mountains and rocks fell back into their places, and at last he halted in amazement by the little pool before a man of flesh and blood, the very prototype and image of himself, who seemed to be as much astonished as he was.

Only for a moment did both halt, however. The next, Gonzalo saw that he had his enemy before him, and he dashed in his spurs and rushed at Ali Moudara, shouting:

"At last! At last!"

The Moslem knight was no whit behind him in fury. He had been hunting in vain all day for Panchita or Pepito—some one he knew—and his short visit to the castle of Lara had only inflamed his anger still further.

The illusions of the mirage had affected him in the same degree as Gonzalo, and he had been equally awed at first by the spectral and gigantic form of his rival.

Straight at Gonzalo he went, and so great was the fury of both, that neither tried to evade the onset of the other, but met in full career, lance to lance, shield to shield.

The tough weapons flew to shivers at the first shock, and the slight Arab horses recoiled and fell over on the ground by the pool.

In a trice both knights had sprung up, drawn their swords, and closed with such savage vindictiveness, that the blades broke ere they had exchanged fifty blows.

Then, as if by one consent, they threw away their swords and shields, grasped their heavy maces, and began to rain blows on each other, never pausing to parry, only intent on doing all the harm they could.

Such work could not last long. Blood began to flow, and the crash of dinging helmets told of the mischief being done.

Neither had ever met such a foe before, and a dim sense of admiration and respect began to pervade their minds, as each grew sick and dizzy, but still fought on. So equally were they matched that neither could obtain a single advantage, and the delivery of a blow by either was the signal for a savage return.

At last they staggered weakly toward each other, unable to lift their maces, and grappled, falling side by side, and trying to use their daggers.

The effort was vain. Both had been so severely battered and had lost so much blood that they swooned side by side, just as the black cloud passed over their heads with a tremendous peal of thunder, and discharged its torrents into the parched valley.

The storm had been brewing all the morning, and the intense heat had made the mirage which had deceived them so long, but the blessed coolness of the shower acted as a complete pacifier to the angry passions of both men at the same time that it roused them from their swoon.

Gonzalo woke to life to find himself staring up at the rain, and felt something beside him which he recognized, with a faint feeling of wonder, as his late antagonist, apparently dead.

With a feeble effort he rose half up on his elbow, just as Ali Moudara opened his eyes, and both men stared into each other's faces wonderingly.

Ali Moudara put up both hands as he lay on his back, and feebly grasped Gonzalo by the shoulders as he whispered:

"I yield not. We will fight it out."

Gonzalo tried to grasp his foe by the throat, and fell forward, half over him, with weakness, muttering:

"Yield thee, or die!"

He was blindly fumbling for his dagger, when Ali Moudara rolled him back and tried to rise above him, but fell back in a perfect collapse.

So there the two knights lay, as powerless as children, staring up at the pouring rain and unable to hurt each other.

A dim sense of the absurdity of their enmity began to dawn over the minds of both, and when Ali Moudara presently spoke, the Christian knight responded in the same spirit.

"What is thy name?" asked Ali, feebly.

"Thou art a good knight."

"What is thine? Thou art a better," whispered Gonzalo.

"I am Ali Moudara, a Moor," said the one.

"And I Gonzalo Gonzales, a Christian," was the reply.

Ali Moudara smiled feebly.

"We are quits. Each has stolen the other's name, and both are paying for it. Good-by, Gonzalo. We could beat the world together, but we are two fools."

Gonzalo groaned.

"We are indeed, and deserve to die. Good-by, Ali. I deserve to die, but they'll save thee. I did the first wrong."

Then they lay silently there, the rain chilling them to the bone now that their fury had abated, for they were all alone, dying in the desolate valley, and the rivulet was fast swelling to a torrent beside them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BABA MOUSTAFA.

WHEN the miserable object before them announced himself as Baba Moustafa, both ladies regarded him with intense astonishment, and Panchita ejaculated:

"Art thou not indeed Pepito?"

"I do not know any Pepito, lady."

"But I am sure I have seen thee ere this. Didst thou not—?"

"Not I, my lady. I never saw your gracious highness before. It is the other lady I know, for she gave me this."

And Baba produced from some recess in his rags the ring Zoraya had given him at Toledo.

"And who is thy master, then?"

"My master is, or rather was, Sheer Ali Moudara al Gebel."

"Why sayest thou 'was'?"

"Because, to please the gracious lady there, I took another master, and told so many lies for him that I fear the angels will never let me cross the bridge to heaven over the pit of hell."

"And who was this master?" asked Zoraya, who was enjoying the humor of the comical vagabond.

"I cannot say, my lady. I always called him 'master,' but he could not fight like my master. He let the Almogavars take me, while he ran away."

"But he said thou didst the running," interposed Panchita, smiling.

Baba Moustafa made a comic grimace.

"I own it, the first time, my lady; and it cost me many a mile's tramp ere I stole a mule and joined the caravan of the Maiden Tribute; but the second time I staid. In fact the Almogavars kept me. How they pricked me with those sharp spears of theirs, till I danced to please them! But, please God, I was not killed, and I hid my ring and got off in the night."

"And what hast thou done ever since, Baba?"

"Lived on anything I could find, my lady, and it was poor living."

"And hast thou seen thy master?"

"No, my lady—that is—I don't quite know, my lady."

"What meanest thou?"

"I mean that I have seen two, my lady, and I know not which is my master."

"And didst thou not call to them?"

"No, my lady. If it were my true master, he has a scurvy trick of beating one with a lance-staff, as if 'twere a rush—and it hurts."

"But surely not, if thou dost not deserve it, Baba."

"The master's blow and the slave's back do not wait for desert, my lady. He strikes first and pardons afterward."

Zoraya here interrupted the conversation with Panchita in her usual impetuous fashion.

"Where saw'st thou these two knights? Were they together?"

"No, my lady. But they are by this time."

"Why? Speak quick!"

"Because they entered the valley next to this, at opposite sides, and must have met ere this."

Both girls uttered a simultaneous cry of alarm and Zoraya hurriedly exclaimed:

"Lead on at once, slave!"

"Where, my lady?" asked Baba innocently.

"Where they are, fool; and be as quick as thy life depended on it."

"No, my lady."

And Baba coolly sat down on a rock as if he were resolved.

"Why not?" asked the lady in the imperious tones of one born in the purple.

"Because I do not wish to be a carpet any more."

"A carpet!" echoed Panchita.

"A carpet, my lady. They beat the carpets when they are dusty, and I am very dusty."

"But they will not beat thee, if we are by them."

"No, my lady, nor if they are too weak to beat."

"What means the slave?" again interposed Zoraya angrily.

"I mean that they have been fighting, my lady."

"Yes? Where? How dost know?"

The questions came fast and eager from both ladies.

"Because I saw them in the next valley. They had a thunderstorm there, and not a drop of rain came outside the valley."

I saw them both lying side by side as the

storm broke, and I suppose they are drowned by this."

Baba spoke with the utmost philosophy. It was clear he was not attached to his master.

Zoraya had turned deadly pale as she listened to his callously told story, and her eyes had a fierce glitter that boded no good to Baba, had he only watched her.

She remained silent awhile, with closed lips, watching him, and then turned to Panchita, to whom she made a silent signal, which the other understood. Both girls carried Moorish whips as part of their equipments, come from the Moors' country, formidable scourges, loaded with iron rings and beads, at intervals along handle and lash. Gentle as was Panchita, she was worked up at last, and she smiled an eager assent to the other's unspoken proposition.

Zoraya now addressed the sulky Baba, who was sitting on the rock the picture of careless impudence.

"Baba," she said, "show us the way to the valley at once."

Her voice was clear and cold, so much so that Baba looked up in surprise. Then he grinned in contempt; for, though an arrant coward, he was as strong as a bull, and his questioners were, after all, only two slender girls.

"Give me your rings, and I may or may not as I choose," he replied.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when both girls uttered a simultaneous cry of anger, rushed their horses at him and began to lash him with all their might.

Up jumped Baba with a howl and grabbed Panchita's bridle, only to let it go as he felt the sting of Zoraya's whip laid on with the strength of an angry woman. He tried to catch the Morisco lady, and the Christian lashed him still harder, till the impudent vagabond fairly fled for his life, howling:

"Mercy! mercy! This is the way."

He ran on at full speed, hastened by the whips whenever he felt disposed to lag, and soon led them up a narrow cleft in the rocks, just wide enough to go in single file, from which they emerged on the steep sides of the enchanted valley where the two knights had fought so long.

All the mirage was gone, and with it the storm. A roaring torrent, about ten feet wide, and brown with the washings of soil, had replaced the tiny thread of water, while the little pool beside which the knights had fought was swollen into a brown and turbid pond.

Then Zoraya uttered a cry of alarm and pointed down.

There, at the edge of the pool, half covered with the water, lay the bodies of two armed men, their horses standing near them, cropping the short grass.

"They are dead!" cried Panchita. "Oh, Zoraya, we are too late!"

"It is never too late. They may be only wounded. Come quickly."

She motioned to Baba to go on, and the look of her face was so menacing that the burly squire obeyed with alacrity, for he had no fancy to be beaten again, and above all things Baba feared a beating.

They rode on down to the pool, where the bodies still lay, and the stout Moor soon dragged them out on the grass, already reviving after the rain.

Then down sprang Zoraya to the ground and examined them intently, while Panchita sat trembling on her horse, afraid to follow her example.

The Moorish girl, in common with most women of her civilized and cultivated land, had some knowledge of medicine; and Panchita was by no means unacquainted with the sight of wounds. But neither had ever been called in to attend the hurts of those to whom they were so closely bound, and both trembled violently.

At last Zoraya looked up.

"He is alive."

"Which one?" whispered Panchita.

"Both. But that is all."

"And which is Gonzalo, and which Ali Moudara?"

"I cannot tell, Panchita."

And indeed it was a puzzle, as the bodies lay to tell which was which.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BEACON FIRE.

WHEN Pepito was left alone by his master, with orders to follow Panchita, the worthy squire was much disgusted with his job. Not

being in love, and having a great fund of philosophy, he had come to the comfortable conviction that Panchita would be sure to find his master any way, and that he, Pepito, need not bother his head about the matter, one way or the other.

"She's in Spain and safe out of the hands of the unbelievers," he said to himself; "therefore my master may find her for himself, while I go into camp."

So saying, he began to hunt about for a desirable spot to pass the night, found one, picketed out the robber's horse, which was well loaded with booty, unsaddled, struck a light with his flint and steel, and soon had a little fire of brushwood burning, by which he cooked his supper of ham and bread cakes, backed by a bottle of good Catalonian wine.

"By my faith, Christian robbers live better than Moorish kiaschefs," he reflected. "Ah I got on the Moor's saddle was barley bread and dates, while the Christian has food fit for a gentleman."

His supper dispatched (not before he had finished the bottle), Pepito went to sleep, and did not waken till the heat of the sun warned him that it was mid-forenoon.

Then he rose leisurely, secured his horse, a stout, country-bred animal, ate the remains of the food, reflecting all the while on the forethought of the Christian robbers as compared with the Moorish kiaschefs, and then, as deliberately as ever, saddled up, mounted and rode off into the mountains.

"And where shall I go now?" quoth Pepito to himself.

In truth, he felt undecided and quite careless. He knew that he was in a part of the mountains not very far from the place where stood the castle of Lara, and he had a shrewd idea that he should find his master somewhere near home.

But, shrewd as was Pepito, he had made one important mistake. He did not know that he had changed masters a second time at Cordova, and was now serving Ali Moudara, instead of Gonzalo Gonzales. The knight himself was aware of the deception, and took care to do nothing to rouse his squire's suspicions this time, ever since he had been dismissed so unceremoniously by Ali's adopted father, Al Mansour.

Chance had brought him to Cordova by way of Medina Al Zobra, while Gonzalo was still hidden in the harem, and the positiveness of the kiaschefs had completed the loss of his identity, a secret he was too proud to disclose to Al Mansour. The fact that he was desperately in love with Panchita made him the less reluctant to obey Al Mansour's stern order to return to Castile; and the only person to whom he had confided his secret on the way was Yakoub Hamet, the captain of the guard, who had kept it religiously, with all an Arab's love of romance and adventure, and had allowed Ali to visit his own castle in the light of a prisoner. Here he discovered the previous visit of Gonzalo and his abstraction of two out of several suits of armor, uniform in color, which had been a present in tribute to Al Mansour from the king of Leon; and it was this discovery that induced Ali to assume the same disguise and deliberately confuse his identity with that of Gonzalo in Castile.

Of all this by-play Pepito knew nothing, keen though he imagined himself, and it was with perfect conviction that he should find his master at home in Lara, that the squire took a path leading in that direction.

He rode on for several hours, out of one valley and into another, till he had attained a high point in the ridge, from which he commanded a view of the plain of Toledo on one side and the table-land of Castile on the other.

His first look was naturally to the north, where he soon distinguished the white spot on the landscape made by the towers of Lara. As soon as he had gazed his fill there, he turned to look at the Moorish plains; and hardly had he done so than he gave a cry of astonishment and positive dismay.

The long road from Toledo to the Almogavars' Pass was hidden by a cloud of white dust, through which glittered and sparkled innumerable points of light, constantly shifting their position.

Pepito knew too well what this portended. He had seen it many and many a time.

That dust and glitter marked a Moorish army on the march; and its great length showed that a most formidable raid was on foot, such as the great Al Mansour had made

more than once before, harrying the Christians from Sierra to the Bay of Biscay.

Already the head of the vast array had reached the Pass of Almogavars, and the dust rolled up like a cloud of smoke into the mountains.

Pepito looked but a little while, and then he made up his mind what to do. The squire became the cool and collected soldier, resolute on warning his country in time. He knew that the principal peaks of the Sierra were provided with great piles of wood, saturated with tar, and covered in from the rain by rude roofs of bark, so that they could be lighted at any time.

In periods of war these beacons were always provided with paid watchmen, but the truce with the Moors having only recently been concluded, Pepito knew that the piles were then left unwatched.

"There is one on Monte del Matador," he thought; "and I can get there in an hour and light it, so as to give the alarm before they have reached the Wizard's Castle. Even Velasquez is a Christian, and should not be taken unawares."

No sooner had he taken this resolve than the stout squire rode off as fast as he could urge his coarsely-bred charger to reach Monte del Matador (Murderer's Hill) before the Moors should have got too far into the unguarded passes.

It was more than an hour, however, before he came to the foot of the peak; and, when he did so, he saw to his surprise another man, dressed in white armor and mounted on a white horse, coming round the base of the peak from the other side.

A glance revealed this to Pepito, and he instantly drew his horse behind a rock, over the top of which he peeped. The stranger had not seen him.

At first sight, armor and horse made Pepito think he had found his own master, but a second glimpse displayed in the stranger a bulk and rotundity very different from the elegant contour of his chief.

The new-comer's horse was a beautiful Barb of very light gray, that seemed unsuited to the weight of its rider and yet stepped out as gayly as if carrying a boy, with the indomitable courage of its race and country.

The stranger's armor was like Pepito's own mail and his visor was up, displaying a shining black face, round and unctuous, albeit wearing a most piteous expression.

Pepito remembered it in an instant as the face of the old chief eunuch of the Caliph's harem, who had assisted them to escape and become so drunk himself in the doing of it that Pepito had carried him off across his own donkey like a sack of flour balanced at both ends.

Remembering further that he was a Moor, the squire waited till old Mousa had got abreast of the rock, when he suddenly dashed out, caught the old fellow around the neck by surprise, and in a truce had him toppled out of his saddle and was leading off the white Barb in triumph.

As for Mousa, he not only made no resistance, but he screamed out with fear as he was falling, and lay there on the ground shrieking for help, for all the world like a woman assaulted in a street.

Pepito laughed heartily when he heard the old negro call for help.

"Why, Mousa, old fool," he cried, cheerfully; "we are not in Cordova any more. This is a Christian country and there are none to help an old unbeliever like thee. I want thy horse and have but borrowed it till I get to Lara. Thou canst take this old camel in change."

So saying, he vaulted out of one saddle into the other, and turned the robber's charger loose while old Mousa slowly rose up and surveyed him ruefully.

A gleam of recognition came into the negro's white-rolling eyes.

"You are the Christian squire that was taken by the kiaschefs?" asked he.

"The same, together with my master. How com'st thou here, Mousa?"

"With thy master, bad luck to him for a Christian dare-devil, that deserts his lady to run after phantoms."

"My master! Thou mistak'st. My master is Don Gonzalo Gonzales."

"That is the name of the madman that ran away with my mistress, the Princess Zoraya."

"What! Did the princess get off after all, Mousa?"

"Ay, of course, and with thy master."

"Nay, I'll swear that—"

Pepito stopped suddenly and smote his thigh with an oath of surprise.

"By the bones of St. Iago, it must be the other again!"

"What other?" asked Mousa.

Pepito made no answer, for at that moment he happened to look toward the Pass of the Almogavars, and saw that the dust had passed far beyond it.

"I've no time to lose. Wait till I come back," he ejaculated hurriedly, and then spurred his horse up to the beacon-pile, and in a few minutes had it lighted and sending a dense black column of smoke up into the blue sky.

He remained by the pile watching for a few minutes, and had the satisfaction of seeing the first answering smoke from the fortress of Lara.

"They are not asleep *there*," he muttered, and immediately rode back to Mousa, whom he found sitting disconsolately on the ground.

"Now, Mousa," he said briskly, "if the Moors please thee, yonder they are. Go to them."

He pointed to the distant dust, but old Mousa shook his head.

"I dare not till I have found my lady. I lost her last night, and have wandered alone ever since."

"Then come with me to the castle of Lara, and I'll wager we'll hear of her there, for the Count of Lara is Don Gonzalo's father."

Old Mousa rose dejectedly and followed the squire, for the fact was that the executioner was as much of a coward as Baba Moustafa, and felt completely demoralized.

Pepito led the way at a rapid pace through the hills toward Lara, and emerged near sunset in the enchanted valley, where he was amazed to find the tableau of wounded knights, weeping ladies, and his own double, Baba Moustafa, all waiting and praying for the help his energy soon rendered.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WOUNDED KNIGHTS.

THE quiet and monotonous routine of the Castle of Lara was broken up in a whirl of excitement during the next few days. The Moors had come into Castile; committing, for a wonder, no depredations, but picketing the horses of their outposts all round the mountain passes in view of the castle; while the household was still electrified over the arrival of the two desperately wounded knights with their ladies, the old negro and Pepito's double, Baba Moustafa.

There was no confusion between the squire and his Moslem half-brother, on account of the difference of their dress; but even the Count and Countess of Lara seemed quite uncertain which of the wounded men was their son, so long as they lay senseless or delirious, which was for several days.

There was no way to tell them apart, either in size, color of hair, features, or marks of any kind, saving only their wounds, which differed in position. One had a stab in the breast, about the third rib on the right, while the other had received the spiked head of a mace on his thigh, cutting fearful contused gashes. Both were bruised and battered about the head, and each had lost a great deal of blood.

Great was the excitement and wonder in the castle, and many were the conjectures of the inmates. Who could it be that was so like their young master, and which was the real Gonzalo?

The old count himself was as much puzzled as any one, and the oldest retainers in the castle could give no explanation.

In the case of Pepito and his double, Baba Moustafa, the case was different, inasmuch as it was well known that old Nuno Salido, doctor of alchemy, and tutor in former times to the dead brothers of Lara, had had two wives, one in Cordova, the other in Castile, Cadijah the slave girl and Aldonza the peasant.

These two half-brothers, while alike in feature and form, were different in disposition, Baba inheriting the vices and virtues of slavery, while Pepito was free-born. One was a merry, deceitful, tricky, cowardly scamp, a regular slave, with no thought beyond present safety; the other was a keen, dry, caustic sol-

dier, faithful to the death, but despising sentimentality.

After their first meeting, all of Pepito's anger vanished. It was impossible to be angry long with the merry rascal Baba, and he was below contempt as a foe; besides which, Pepito recognized the ties of kinship when he learned that Baba was indeed his brother.

"But these, our masters, cannot be brothers, Baba," observed the squire, as they chatted over matters in the hall of Lara. "All the count's sons were killed twenty years ago, and he has never had but one since."

Baba winked at Pepito.

"None that folks know of. But how is it about the Lady Ayesha, of whom people here tell me? She was much with the count while he was a captive, and followed him for love."

Pepito colored up angrily.

"Hark ye, brother, I was a boy when that sweet lady came hither, and know for a surety she was pure as an angel. Our Lady Sancha would have found out if she had not been. Whatever else is this knight, he is not *her* son."

"Then who is he, in the name of Allah?"

"Ah, that indeed, brother. No one knows yet."

No one seemed to know.

Not even the count, who stood by the great state-bed whereon were laid the two wounded youths, pallid, insensible, sleeping heavily side by side.

The old warrior was tugging nervously at his beard as he looked down, and muttered ever and anon:

"How can this be? I have not two sons? Which is mine?"

The two ladies, who officiated as nurses, seemed to be less disturbed in mind, attending impartially to the patients when either awoke for awhile from his feverish sleep, and leaving it to their moments of returning consciousness to decide which were their individual lovers.

Still more complacent, and wearing a brow totally unruffled for the first time in twenty years, was the venerable Countess of Lara, who was always gliding in and out of the room, as if only for the pleasure of looking at the strange picture.

"They will not die," she said frequently in tones of great confidence. "God has heard my prayer."

But she would not explain what she meant, merely repeating:

"Wait till they wake. We shall soon know all."

In the mean time the garrison of the castle was accumulating food and warlike stores, expecting a siege, and the men of Castile were mustering far and near under the banners of the King of Leon, to repel the expected raid of Al Mansour's warriors.

Panchita's father had been heard from, and had sent an escort to visit the castle and bring back his daughter, who, however, declined to go home.

As soon as the cavalier in charge had heard her story, he decided in the true chivalric spirit that the honor of the lady was safe in the hands of the house of Lara, and went back to tell the Prince of the Asturias how Don Gonzalo Gonzales had rescued the princess from the power of the Moors and was worthy of her hand. He had not been able to separate the identity of the two knights, and had heard nothing of Ali Moudara.

And now news began to come in from the surrounding country of the doings of the Moors. They were encamped in the valley of Don Ruy Velasquez, and had sent an embassy to Burgos, with a demand of some sort that was variously stated by Dame Rumor.

Some said it was for a part of the Maiden Tribute that was missing, others that it was for compensation for some insult alleged to have been offered to Al Mansour, but all agreed that the Moors were awaiting the return of the embassy before commencing hostilities, and all were burning with anxiety as to the result of the negotiations.

Day after day passed by, and the fever of their wounds at last left the wounded men, who awoke within a few minutes of each other and looked curiously around them.

The count and countess, with Panchita, Zoraya and the old seneschal and his wife, were gathered anxiously round the bed, when the first invalid roused up and looked curiously at them.

For awhile he said nothing, and then asked, in a faint voice:

"What is this? Where is she?"

The countess glided forward and looked at him with her faded eyes in a gaze of yearning tenderness:

"Dost thou not know thy mother, my boy?" she asked, softly.

The wounded man smiled faintly.

"I do not know, madam. I would I had a mother like you, but the Lady Zeinab told me I was an orphan."

Here the other, roused by the voices, woke in his turn, looked at the countess and whispered:

"Mother, it is Gonzalo. I have won my spurs fairly."

The suspense was removed.

Zoraya moved quickly to the side on which Gonzalo lay, and asked:

"Who am I, then?"

"Thou art my sovereign lady and mistress, Zoraya, Star of Cordova," answered he, promptly. "Mother, I have gained the sweetest lady in the world for thy daughter."

But still the mother hesitated, and her eyes were fixed yearningly on Ali Moudara, to whose side Panchita had moved as soon as he first spoke aloud.

The Moorish cavalier lay staring intently at the countess, heedless of the presence of Panchita, who was softly kissing and crying over his thin and wasted hand.

"Who, in Allah's great name, art thou, lady?" he asked, wonderingly, and a dead silence came over the room to hear the answer.

Even Gonzalo, attracted by the sudden stillness, turned his head round and looked with amazement on this other, who was a Moor to all seeming, and yet his very image. But ere the countess could answer, came a loud uproar from the castle without, confused shouts and cries, the rattle of arms, the blare of trumpets and the sharp clash of cymbals, the deep rolling of the Moorish kettle-drums, and the thunder of thousands of horse-hoofs.

Then they heard the loud shouts, all in unison, of a cheering crowd, and a battery of impatient knocks sounded on the door, while a voice cried out:

"Senor Conde of Lara, the Moorish and Christian embassies have come to the castle and demand admittance. Shall we let them in?"

Frowning impatiently, the old count hurried to the door.

"I am busy. They have just woke up. Who has come?"

"The King of Leon, the Count of Castile and the great Al Mansour himself are here," answered the warder, hurriedly. "They demand the Princess Zoraya, daughter of the Caliph, and one Ali Moudara, the Lion of the Rock, whom they swear are held prisoners in this castle."

"Let them in," replied the old noble, instantly. "They shall see for themselves if we have prisoners here. Now, by my faith, I am glad they are come. Go to the hall, and I will follow."

Away went the warder as hard as he could run, and in a short time the halls of Lara were filled with a brilliant assembly of Christians and Moors, while the old count welcomed with stately courtesy his imposing guests, who were soon seated at the head of the long table. The first words were spoken by King Bermudo, of Leon, a large, fair-haired, Gothic knight, who looked like a giant beside the slender old Vizier, but who was in reality his plaything in war and politics.

"Well, count," he cried, in his jolly tones, "my lord the *hajib*" (Arab title for Vizier, which is Turkish) "says that you have stolen the Princess of Cordova and Ali Moudara. How say you? Are they here?"

"The Princess Zoraya is here. She came with my son, Gonzalo Gonzales, whom she aided to escape from Cordova. They love each other, sire, and wish to be wedded."

Al Mansour said not a word, but stroked his beard and looked keenly on.

"But reflect that she is the daughter of the Caliph, count. I cannot go to war to please a love sick pair."

Al Mansour waved his hand.

"Let it be as Lara has said. But where is my son, Ali Moudara?"

"There is one here who is said to bear that name—" began the count, but the Vizier cut him short abruptly.

"Wilt thou give him up?"

"No," said a clear voice behind the count, and the Countess Sancha swept forward. "I will not give him up to the Moor."

Al Mansour's eyes glittered.

"Why not, woman?"

"Because he is my son," was the unexpected answer, and Sancha of Lara looked proudly in the old Moor's face.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE JUDGMENT OF AL MANSOUR.

A MURMUR of incredulity ran through the hall as the venerable countess made her startling assertion, and the Count of Lara himself cried out amazedly:

"Thy son, Sancha! Ours?"

"As the sun shines, my husband, thou art his father and I am his mother."

The old man was so much overcome by the news that he could only falter out the words:

"Our son! Our son!"

"Our son indeed, stolen by the savage Moors of Al Mansour, in the very moment his twin brother was born."

The only person in the hall to whom the news seemed to be no surprise was the great Moor, Al Mansour. He eyed Sancha as keenly as ever, and began to stroke his beard, muttering:

"Meer Haroun did not deceive me. He said he took the child from the mother's bed."

But the curiosity of every one else was at fever heat, and the Count of Lara cried out impatiently:

"Go on, Sancha! Go on! Thou never toldst me a word of this."

The countess smiled tenderly on her old partner.

"Why should two be sad, if one can bear it alone? I, alone with Aldonza Salido, knew the truth. Why should I have tortured thee, my good lord?"

"But, sweetest lady," interrupted King Bermudo courteously; "we are all dying to hear the truth of this strange history. Tell us we beseech you."

"Thus then it came to pass, my lord. The count my husband was away at the wars, and I was sick in my chamber, when the Moors attacked our castle by surprise. We had no watchman in those days. My son was born even while they battered at the gates, and I was alone with poor Aldonza (since dead) when they burst into my chamber and began to fire the castle. One of them, a gray-bearded man that seemed to be a chief, snatched the child from the bed where he lay by me, and cried to his men: 'Fire the castle! This child at least shall be a true believer.' Then he rushed out, and we heard shouts and blows; while I, nearly mad with grief, felt the pangs that told me I had another child left."

"Holy St. Iago!" ejaculated the king, admiringly. "What a heroine! 'Twould have killed most women."

"We women of Castile are hard to kill, sire. Even while I lay there, deserted by all but Aldonza, my lord count arrived by chance, took the Moors in rear, drove them away, and came in to save me and welcome him he thought to be his only son."

The old count tottered over to his aged wife and embraced her with great tenderness, murmuring:

"My Sancha! All these years!"

"Ay, my lord, all these years, I hid it from thee; for why should I have saddened thee more? Seven noble sons have we lost by the Moor, and this one thou hadst not even seen. I bore my sorrow alone, but it was none the less keen. Many a night have I lain awake, thinking of that tender babe in the power of the Infidels, and wondering where he was, whether alive or dead. How often I have prayed God to let me see him ere I died, if indeed he were not already dead. And God has heard my prayer at last."

The old Moor's face during this recital had been hard and stern, fixed in inscrutable purpose.

When the countess had finished he asked, sharply:

"How knowest thou, granting all this, that Ali Moudara is thy son?"

"Is he yours, my lord?" asked the lady, with quiet directness.

Al Mansour's color rose and he bit his lip. To be childless was the one drop of bitterness in the cup of the great conqueror.

"Ask me no questions, woman. I have adopted this boy; brought him up as my son; made him a prince among princes. Should he not be mine? He loves the orange groves and palms of the South. Why should he be tied up like a mule in a stable in these bare halls,

where beauty is a thing unknown? My son came hither against my will."

"Nay, my lord, I'll swear I heard your worship tell him to go," broke in Pepito, quite unceremoniously; for the bluff squire and Baba were standing near by and heard all that passed.

Al Mansour turned his most freezing gaze on the audacious squire; but without the slightest effect; and the stern Vizier's face relaxed into a grim smile as Pepito went on:

"Your worship insisted that he was Don Gonzalo, my master, and, in good faith you drove him out."

"But I mistook him for Don Gonzalo, friend," answered Al Mansour in a tone full of gentleness, acquired under the tuition of the Koran, which holds all believers to be equal before God.

"Then, if my lord did not know him, who shall say he is my lord's son?"

This time Al Mansour laughed a short grim laugh.

"Thou art witty, Baba Moustafa. Who is that with thee?"

"Marry, sir, that is my brother Baba Moustafa, the son of my father—rest his soul—and I, if your worship will allow me, am Pepito."

The Vizier scanned the two brothers closely. They were now both dressed exactly alike, and it was difficult to tell which was the slave, except from Pepito's words.

"Go into that crowd," said Al Mansour; "hide yourselves, and then come back and stand before me again silently. I would see if I can tell you apart."

The brothers obeyed, and there was a dead silence in the hall as they came back and stood before the old minister. Al Mansour put out his finger at one.

"Thou art Pepito, the freeman. I know the slave by his downcast looks."

The man addressed giggled like a foolish child and retorted:

"My lord has guessed wrong. I am Baba Moustafa."

"Repeat the *fatiha*," snapped out Al Mansour irritably.

His mood changed to triumph in a moment, when the man he had not addressed glibly repeated the Arabic formula of faith, while he who had claimed to be Baba stood looking foolish. The Vizier smiled with much satisfaction at the results of his penetration.

"Thou seest it is only fools that read by the outside, while the windows of the soul are open for a wise man's vision to look through. Stand aside, Pepito."

No one in the hall interfered with the great Moorish minister while he spoke. He seemed, in that Christian land, to be regarded with as much awe and respect as when he sat on his own judgment seat at Cordova, the fact that a vast array of Moorish cavalry was waiting within call had a restraining effect on the most bigoted of the Christian cavaliers who might have wished to dispute his authority.

Now he turned on the Countess of Lara in the same grave and collected manner he always affected.

"Ali Moudara is thy son. I knew it long ago, but did not know that the other was born. Wilt thou let him come back to me if he will, lady? I can give him more than he can find in Castile. I have no child to solace my old age, and I love Ali as if he were my own son."

Now the countess began to tremble.

"Oh, my lord," she said, piteously, "do not rob me of him a second time. Think that he hardly knows me yet. You have power and riches, and we have only our two sons now. The enemy has taken all the rest but a few sheep."

"Then you will not let your son be a prince by adoption?" asked Al Mansour, unruffled. "You prefer to sacrifice his future to your own selfishness?"

Sancha of Lara clasped her hands.

"Ah, do not speak like that, my lord. I know not what to do. I love him so, now that I have found him at last."

"Do you refuse to let him come to me?" pursued the Vizier, steadily. "Reflect and answer."

"Oh, my lord, I refuse nothing. I only entreat. Let him love me. Give me a little time, ere I lose him again, to hear him call me mother."

The old Moor contracted his heavy brows and looked at her steadily for some seconds ere he replied, which he did by an abrupt change of the subject.

"Where is the princess, Zoraya? One of thy sons stole her away, and the Caliph has ordered me to kill every man, woman and child in Castile if she be not given up to us at once."

It was the count's turn to answer.

"The Lady Zoraya is here. She came of her own free will, and has been treated as a princess all the time she was here."

"Let her come, then," retorted Al Mansour, gruffly. "I would see her at once."

The count looked uneasily at the King of Leon, but Bermudo gave him an impatient signal to obey, and he left the hall to fetch Zoraya.

While he was gone a dead silence prevailed, for the inscrutable face of the Vizier was decidedly not an invitation to conversation, and all the Christians were decidedly uneasy at the prospect of war threatened by the mad vagaries of a romantic knight-errant.

Presently there was a stir in the hall, and old Mousa, fully dressed in the stately robes of his office as Chief Eunuch of the Palace of Al Zohra, strode into the hall with his keen saber drawn and stretched out before him to clear a way, as he called out in his cracked voice:

"Room for Sitt Zoraya! Room!"

Al Mansour turned his head sharply and watched the old negro with a fierce and threatening eye, which Mousa pretended not to notice, but under which he secretly quailed.

And then all attention was turned on the Princess Zoraya who entered the room closely veiled and accompanied by Panchita, whose face was visible.

Al Mansour smiled grimly as he surveyed the couple but he said not a word till they both stood before him. King Bermudo in the spirit of chivalry jumped up to offer his seat, but the old Moor waved him back and allowed the girls to stand in true Oriental subservience ere he spoke sarcastically:

"So this is the Star of Cordova, fled to the Christians with a strange man."

"Not so, my lord," answered Zoraya, with spirit, "but the daughter of thy master under the care of the chief of the Harem Guard. I have been traveling to see the world as a princess should."

"And do the savage wilds of Castile please the princess better than the gardens of Cordova?" asked the old minister in the same ironical tone of courtesy.

"I can answer that question to my father," was the proud reply. "The princesses of our line do not stand to be judged by their subjects. Be pleased to rise, my lord, while I take my seat."

The old Vizier looked at her from under his bushy brows with grave amusement, but did not offer to stir as he answered in the sententious style of the Moors.

"Kings and queens are made by men, but fathers are of the ordering of God. I represent thy father here, disobedient child. Behold his signet ring. Art thou ready to return to Cordova or must the guards force thee?"

Zoraya stamped her little foot as if she were angry.

"Where is my litter? Where are the guards? Is this the attendance for the Caliph's daughter?"

Al Mansour exerted his voice as loud as her own crying in affected anger:

"What ho! ye dogs outside there! The litters for the ladies at once and the guards. Will ye keep us all night?"

There was a bustle at the door and four gorgeous litters borne by black slaves were brought into the hall as fast as the bearers could trot, while Al Mansour waved his hand as if dismissing an audience.

"Place the ladies there and bring down the prisoners at once."

Then there was a start of surprise and dismay, while the count and countess ran to Al Mansour, asking both together:

"What prisoners? Whom mean ye?"

"I mean your two sons and this lady Panchita," answered the Moor, sternly. "Ali Moudara thou hast allowed me, and the other son is a prisoner. He hath stolen the Caliph's daughter and must be judged therefor in Cordova. This other lady was stolen from the Maiden Tribute, and belongs to the harem of the Commander of the Faithful. Resistance is useless. Ask your liege lord if it be not."

Pale as death, the old people turned to King Bermudo for help, only to be met by a polite shrug.

"What can I do! A treaty is a treaty, and

your son broke it. They say he attacked the Maiden Tribute, slew Aben Amar and carried off the ladies. We cannot fight in such a bad cause. I am sorry for thy loss, count, but—"

The old nobleman and his wife were so much stupefied with grief and amazement that they could make neither complaint nor resistance, but stood gazing in dumb grief while the crowds of Moors filled the hall and castle, carried the splendid litters up-stairs, and presently returned with the two wounded men, who were carried away before their parents' eyes as the latter stood helplessly by.

Not till the last litter had gone did Al Mansour make any remark. Then he rose from the carpet on which he had been sitting cross-legged all this time, and swept over to the count and countess.

"The mercy of Allah is as great as his justice," observed the old Moor, in his significant and sententious way. "The thief stole a loaf when he was starving, and the cadi gave him the stick first and a purse of gold after. Come to Cordova after the Ramadan, and ye shall be all welcome. Pass by the valley of Velasquez, and ye shall see a ruin. The devil stole all the virtues from man except hope. Trust in God, and peace be with you."

He swept out of the hall, followed by his retinue, and King Bermudo was not long in imitating his example.

The Christian nobles were anxious to escape the sight of a grief they could not alleviate, and the poor old count and countess found themselves within an hour after deserted by all but their own retainers, while the whole country was covered with the tracks of the retreating host of Moors, who had gone as they came, threatening but not destroying.

The aged couple were entirely prostrated by grief at first, and took no sense from the parting words of Al Mansour till a shepherd brought them in news that recalled them to mind.

The man had roamed with his flock as far as the valley where stood the Wizard's Castle, and had seen with amazement that the fortress had vanished, to be replaced by a blackened pile of ruins.

Then they remembered what the Moorish Vizier had said to them as he went away:

"Pass by the valley of Velasquez and ye shall see a ruin."

The count clasped his hands in wonder as he heard:

"God has avenged us at last by the hand of the Moor. Ruy Velasquez is punished. But what else did the *hajib* say, Sancha. Think and remember. Thy head is better than mine."

"He said" replied Sancha musingly, as if trying to recall the words:

"Come to Cordova after the Ramadan and ye shall all be welcome. Trust in God, and Peace be with you."

"And it is three months yet to the end of the Ramadan," sighed the count. "Sancha, there is hope in his words. He cannot have the heart to kill our boys. Let us wait and hope."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE fast of the Ramadan was over and the city of Cordova was bright with gorgeous hangings and garlands of flowers for the opening of the great feast of Beiram, when the Moslem world makes amends to itself for the enforced abstinence of the Ramadan.

The people were all agog for the public games that Al Mansour had announced to take place in the plain between Cordova and Al Zohra, where the cavaliers were to play jereed, fight with wild beasts as in the Roman circus, run races and give exhibitions of prowess with various weapons.

The success of this festival was further assured by the presence of several visiting Christian princes, who were received with true Arab hospitality by the Vizier, and royally lodged in the palace at Cordova.

King Bermudo of Leon was here, with Ruy Fernandez, Count of Castile, Hernan Ximenes, Prince of the Asturias, and a crowd of high-born nobles, among whom the aged Count and Countess of Lara, in their plain equipage, seemed lost.

Nevertheless, it was to this very couple, simply equipped as they were, that the great Vizier assigned the most splendid lodgings of all, along with the Prince of the Asturias, and

from the moment of their arrival they were loaded, after the Moorish fashion, with presents.

Count Gonzalo was much cast down by the long period which had elapsed since he had seen or heard from his sons, and he had a companion in misery in the old Prince of the Asturias, who was equally inconsolable for the loss of his daughter Panchita.

The only person of the trio who seemed calm and hopeful was Sancha, and the venerable countess was constantly telling her husband that all would yet be well. The Prince of the Asturias she consoled in this wise:

"My lord did not see the Princess Zoraya, or he would have no fears. She is the only person that dare cross the will of Al Mansour, and she will not let the Princess Panchita come to harm. Trust in God, my lord, and all will yet be well. I feel sure of it."

They were royally entertained by Al Mansour's orders for three days, but in all that time had not so much as seen the great minister, save from afar, and he seemed purposely to avoid a personal interview with the three people he had treated with so much seeming rigor.

On the third day they received news that they were invited to witness the games in the plain beginning at daybreak, so as to conclude before the great heats came on. The same evening they were bidden to a great feast at Medina Al Zohra, the matchless palace of the Caliph Hasehem, of which they had heard so many wonders, though no Christian had been as yet admitted to its walls. Gorgeous litters were sent to the palace for their accommodation, and it was with a great fluttering of heart that the much-suffering Count and Countess of Lara found themselves at last within its walls.

They had assumed the splendid dresses sent them by the munificent Caliph through his minister, and were ushered into the grand banquet hall with its five hundred marble columns and vaulting inlaid with mosaic of various colors enriched with gold. To their surprise none but slaves were waiting to receive them, and they had all taken their places on the divans by the low tables before the sound of music announced the approach of the Caliph preceded by the great Prime Minister.

Hasehem, a handsome but effeminate-looking Arab of the old Saracen stock, was magnificently attired, jewels flashing from every hem in his robes, and attended by a numerous retinue of black slaves. The Vizier, in a plain robe of white silk with a green cloak and turban, presented a grave contrast to all the magnificence around him, and yet it was to him that every one looked for orders, and he it was who spoke the words of welcome to the guests in the name of his nominal master. The Caliph, on his part, took his seat in silence after a slight inclination to his guests, and appeared to be waiting for the Vizier to do the honors of the place.

Anxious as were the Count and Countess of Lara, they did not dare to ask of Al Mansour the questions they longed to utter, for there was a ceremonious reserve in the Vizier's manner that precluded a nearer approach. It was not till the feast was over, and the dancing girls had finished their performances, that Al Mansour gave a signal to the captain of the guards and addressed the guests collectively as soon as the official had left the hall.

"My noble lords and princes," began Al Mansour, "it has come to the knowledge of my gracious master that one of our guests here, the Count of Lara, has suffered grave injustice at our hands, all unwittingly and through the evil deeds and falsehoods of a Christian knight, Don Ruy Velasquez, who married Lambra, of Castile. My lords of Castile, you know the lady."

The Count of Castile bent his head.

"I do, to my sorrow. She hath—"

"Paid the penalty of an evil life by death at the hands of Heaven," interposed Al Mansour, solemnly. "The lightning struck her castle and set it on fire, with the same bolt that struck her dead, on the day our armies entered Castile to reclaim the stolen princess. 'Twas the same storm, my Lord of Lara, in which your two sons fought till they nearly slew each other."

Sancha, of Lara, heaved a deep sigh of relief from suspense, and the count exclaimed:

"Noble Al Mansour, we thought the Moors had done that."

"Not a blow was struck by our soldiers. We came for justice, and that obtained, we came

back with our prisoners. Behold the guiltiest of all."

As he spoke, the captain of the guards re-entered the room, followed by Ruy Velasquez, fully armed, his face set in a look of fierce defiance.

"There is thine ancient foe, Count of Lara, the man who forged my name to the order of execution for thy seven sons. Dost thou impeach him?"

"How can an old man like me do aught against him?" demanded the old man in a querulous tone. "Give me back my noble sons, and we will take order with this villain."

They are here," answered the Vizier, quietly.

He clapped his hands, and instantly into the room stalked the twins of Lara, all in white armor, and so strangely alike that none could tell them apart.

There was a murmur of admiration through the hall as these grandly beautiful knights advanced. Ruy Velasquez turned pale and stared wildly at them as if he doubted his eyes, but the parents forgot all ceremony and ran to embrace their sons, overjoyed to see them alive and safe at last.

"It is all right, mother," whispered one of them. "I was Ali Moudara, but I am Fernan Gonzales, and we shall all be happy. God bless the good *hajib*."

Al Mansour looked on with a smile, and then asked aloud:

"Well, my lord, do you impeach Ruy Velasquez?"

The old count turned round with swimming eyes.

"Not now; not now. I have my sons again and the rest are in heaven. Leave him to God, great Al Mansour. He is punished by seeing us happy."

Al Mansour nodded his head.

"Thou speakest like a wise man. Vengeance is for Allah. Nevertheless, justice is for the king as the deputy of Allah on earth. Who will punish this man for forging my name and making Al Mansour unjust?"

The late Ali Moudara stepped forward and bowed low.

"That is my place, my second father. Trust me to punish him to-morrow."

"I will," replied Al Mansour, gravely. "See that he escapes not."

He gave another signal, and Ruy Velasquez, who had not said a word all this time, but had stood looking sullen and defiant was led out of the hall by the guards.

Then Al Mansour began to smile again as he turned to the old Prince of the Asturias.

"Has my lord lost any one he would wish to see again?" he asked.

"You know well I have," was the anxious reply. "Torture me not, I pray thee, Al Mansour, but tell me all."

"The wise man waits the pleasure of the king, that he may not anger him with asking at a wrong time," said Al Mansour, as sententiously as ever. "A father must lose his daughter at some time."

"Oh, would to Heaven I had lost her to a Christian," groaned the prince. "I would give her to the poorest knight of Castile rather than know her the slave even of a monarch."

"Wilt thou give her to the son of the Count of Lara if the Caliph give her a dower such as he gives his own daughter?" asked Al Mansour, dryly.

"Would to God I had the chance! Yes, a thousand times, yes!"

"It is done. Bring in thy bride, my son," cried the old Vizier, in tones of triumph.

Instantly Ali Moudara left the hall, only to return, a moment later, with Panchita, more beautiful than ever in her Moorish dress, and red as a rose with modest shame at the assembly she found before her.

The old prince, in his turn, forgot ceremony as he ran to embrace his daughter, and the Caliph so far roused himself from his usual languid abstraction as to say:

"Well done, *hajib*! The boy is worthy of her. Now for our pest!"

Al Mansour smiled his usual grim smile and looked at Gonzalo, who was standing melancholy, alone, looking at his brother's happiness in a contemplative fashion that had some envy about it.

"The Caliph is pleased to give his daughter in marriage on the same day that he weds his slave to our adopted son Ali Moudara," observed the Vizier dryly. "Who is to be the man my master blesses with the prize?"

"Call in our Shooting Star and let her de-

side it," was the verdict of Al Mansour and he clapped his hands.

Immediately, enter old Mousa as fat as ever followed by Zoraya, veiled with such transparent tissue that it was only an evasion of the laws of Mohammed.

Gonzalo turned toward her with an eager, anxious look that was soon changed to one of ineffable joy as Zoraya placed her hand in his, led him silently to her father and knelt down with him before the Caliph.

As for the Commander of the Faithful he smothered a yawn under his silky black beard, waved his hand over them and said:

"The *hajib* has said it. She has been the torment of my life, and I give her freely to thee with a dower. Take her to Castile and Allah be with thee, young man."

Gonzalo made no scruple at taking the gift thus carelessly thrown to him, but the tears came into the eyes of the giddy princess as she retired, and she whispered to Gonzalo:

"I will not torment thee at least, my love. Oh had he only blessed me!"

"We will bless each other," was the answering whisper in tones of ardor. "Oh, Zoraya, I have thee at last."

"And now, my lords," observed the Vizier, cheerfully, "we have punished our thieves for stealing, and our runaways for flight. The Christian maid would not wed a Caliph, and she takes a simple Moslem knight. The Christian knight would steal a princess and has suffered the pains of a prison only to be wed to a Moslem woman. Now let us to rest that we may see the games betimes in the morning."

The plain of Al Zohra was covered with spectators next day to see the games and great were the feats of arms exhibited. There was playing of jereed in the Moslem way, and heavy tilting in Christian fashion not unattended with wounds and death though it was all said to be in sport.

One battle excited great interest from its tragic ending. A knight in white armor on a white Barb horse met a Christian knight in dark armor on a heavy black charger. The contest seemed to be unequal for the black knight was larger and heavier in every way. Nevertheless in the very first shock the white knight struck him full in the throat with his lance shattering his gorget and bore him over the horse's croup a dead man, his spear not even grazing the side of his antagonist.

The falling knight never spoke after he fell but lay staring up at the sky with an expression of blank horror and affright that stamped itself on his dead face for hours after and had not faded away when they laid him in the grave, as the victim of an accident.

But the few in the secret knew that it was no accident, but the wrongs of Lara avenged by the adopted son of Al Mansour, and it was Gonzalo who embraced his brother closely as they carried the body away and said in a low voice:

"It was thy place. Thou art more worthy than I, my brother."

There is but little more to tell ere we have closed with the wild old legend of the Brothers of Lara which we have woven into this our tale of old times. The weddings of Fernan and Gonzalo Gonzales to the Princesses Zoraya and Panchita were celebrated at Cordova in Christian and Moslem fashion successively and the House of Lara enriched by the possessions of Ruy Velasquez through the Countess Sancha his sister, and by the munificent dowers given by the Caliph to the ladies became one of the richest as it was the oldest house in Spain.

Pepito and Baba in due time married Castilian women and became the founders of a thrifty house of merchants in Barcelona, where their descendants are found at the present day, and the name of Salido y Nunez is synonymous with thrift.

The count and countess lived ten years after the marriage of their twin sons, and were noted far and wide for spoiling their grandchildren excessively, but after their death the Christian kingdom gained rapidly on the Moors, for Al Mansour was gathered to his fathers and there was none to take his place.

The indolent Haschem succumbed to a revolution, the glittering fabric of Moorish Dominion fell to pieces as quickly as it had risen and the grandchildren of Panchita and Zoraya

lived to see the Mosque of Cordova turned into a Christian Cathedral and Medina Al Zohra a heap of ruins.

But, all the same, the lovers were happy, and so the world goes on and will go on again, for love outlasts all kingdoms and is the only thing that is always new.

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